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The Origins of Wave Elections:
Narrative Control, Polarization and Turnout in
New Hampshire Electoral Politics, 2006-2012

By

Zachary Jonas

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirement for
Honors in the Department of Political Science

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ABSTRACT:

JONAS, ZACHARY The Origins of Wave Elections: Narrative Control, Polarization and Turnout in New Hampshire Electoral Politics, 2006-2012. Department of Political Science, June 2014.

ADVISOR: Clifford Brown

This thesis investigates the origin of wave elections in New Hampshire in 2006, 2010 and 2012. It finds that recent demographic shifts in the state laid the groundwork for these dramatic electoral results. This paper also examines the nationalization and polarization that have redefined New Hampshire's political landscape and contributed to massive partisan shifts in state government. The combination of demographic changes and a polarized political culture have created an electoral environment for both Republicans and Democrats that favors turnout, increasing the importance of agenda setting and narrative control in order to produce high turnout among core constituencies.

Chapter 1 discusses the important demographic trends of the past several decades that have pushed New Hampshire leftward politically. Chapters 2 through 5 discuss the 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 elections respectively, with special attention paid to the importance of narrative control and turnout in determining the results of each contest. Finally, the conclusion will tie the recent wave elections in New Hampshire to the national political environment and the general direction of American politics.

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This work is the result of my love affair with New Hampshire, which began on a Union College mini-term to the state in December of 2011. My internship during that mini-term turned into a job in Concord that changed the course of my political, academic and personal life. New Hampshire is a beautiful state filled with beautiful people and fascinating politics. Thanks to the generosity of New Hampshire and her people, I know that I will always feel at home in the Granite State.

I'd like to thank Deborah "Arnie" Arnesen, the Hattans, and the other people who hosted me in their homes for their generosity and kindness throughout my time living in Concord. I'd also like to thank Zandra Rice-Hawkins, Caitlin Rollo and the rest of the Granite State Progress crew for teaching me the ropes and exposing me to the fascinating world of New Hampshire's State House.

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Finally, I'd like to thank my family, especially my mom and dad, for all their love and support throughout this difficult project.

Introduction

This paper seeks to identify the root causes of several wave elections in the state of New Hampshire over the past decade. New Hampshire is a small but fascinating state with incredible importance to national politics for a number of reasons. It has become a swing state and presidential bell weather in recent years, and its first-in-the-nation primary has long been an important stepping stone for presidential hopefuls, giving rise to the saying “As New Hampshire goes, so goes the nation.” A relatively reliable Republican stronghold as late as the 1980s, New Hampshire is now a battleground state hotly contested by both parties. In 2006, Democrats managed (for the first time in 100 years) to capture the state legislature and executive branch while also taking both federal representative seats. In 2008 they managed to hold all of these gains and pick up a federal Senate seat. In 2010, every one of these victories was reversed, and the Republican Party retook them all (with the exception of the governorship). In 2012, the pendulum swung back the other way, and Democrats regained control of every organ of state government, with the exception of the state Senate.

So what caused these wild shifts in the partisan composition of state government and federal representation? The answer contained within these pages is complex, but can be boiled down to several essential factors.

The first and most important factor underlying New Hampshire’s recent electoral waves are the changing demographics of the state. New Hampshire has long been dependent on immigration from other states to bolster its economy and grow its population. In fact, up until the Great Recession beginning in 2007, New Hampshire’s population growth was largely driven by net migration, or the excess of in-migrants over out-migrants. As I will show in Chapter 1, this migration has strongly impacted the partisan composition of the state electorate. Older, more

conservative voters have tended to leave the state, while (relatively) younger, more liberal voters from across the Northeast have moved in to replace them. These migrants bring their liberal politics with them and, when encouraged by strong Democratic turnout operations, swamp more established conservative voters at the polls. Without this demographic shift, the wave elections and Democratic upsets of the past decade would be difficult if not simply impossible.

Demographics, however, are only part of the story.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 will examine the 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 elections respectively. 2006, 2010 and 2012 were all wave elections in New Hampshire. For the purpose of simplicity, this paper will use a relatively broad definition of wave election: a wave election is an election in which one political party wins substantially more races than the other. Wave elections also result in a change in partisan control of government. Although 2008 does not meet these criteria, it is still an important election to this analysis because the Democrats maintained all of their gains from 2006, a first for New Hampshire. This hints at the demographic changes above, and also sets the stage for the 2010 Republican wave that ousted the Democratic majority at the State House in Concord.

Chapter 1, in many ways, sets the framework for the rest of the paper. As discussed above, the demographic shifts that have pushed New Hampshire leftward made possible the wave elections of the past decade, but did not directly cause them. Chapters 2-5 use polling data and other evidence to determine the direct causes of these wave elections. Specifically, they focus on the nationalization of state politics, the use of narrative control/agenda setting and the importance of turnout in determining the victor in these electoral contests.

Nationalization of State Politics

Beginning with E.E. Schattschneider in 1960, scholars have identified a trend towards the nationalization of American elections.¹ Since the New Deal of the 1930s, politics have increasingly shifted from local to national issues at all levels of American political discourse.² Scholarly separation of “state” and “national” politics has become increasingly untenable as a result. National issues, such as the economy, health care, the deficit and foreign policy, have largely overtaken state level issues as the primary driver of electoral discourse at all levels across the country, leading to a number of interesting contrasts. On the one hand, the nationalization of politics leads even lowly New Hampshire legislators in the state House of Representatives to involve themselves in debates over the birthplace of the president.³ By the same token, this nationalization of politics allows the president himself to specifically target the speaker of the New Hampshire House in the national news media for his supposedly extreme comments on reproductive rights.⁴ The ability of state legislators to specifically target the president of the United States, and the ability of the president to use state legislators and issues as campaign messaging and fundraising tools, points to the nationalized quality of local and state politics in the modern era.

Scholars have since identified two distinct dimensions of the nationalization theorized by Schattschneider. First, there is the equal distribution of party votes across different districts, otherwise known as “vote homogeneity” or “static nationalization.” This dimension measures support for a political party across the country at a single moment in time. The second

¹ Schattschneider, E.E. *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (1960)

² Nolette, Paul. “Gubernatorial Power and the Nationalization of State Politics” *Tulsa Law Review* Vol. 49 Ed. 2 (Winter, 2013) pg. 280

³ Boyer, Dave. “New Hampshire lawmakers question Obama’s citizenship” *The Washington Times* 2012

⁴ Connors, Molly. “Obama takes on the State House” *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

dimension, “dynamic nationalization,” measures the degree to which a party’s vote across various districts changes uniformly over time. Essentially, this measure helps to quantify the importance of specific, national events that change the level of party support uniformly across the electorate, separate from local variables.⁵ Because this paper is an analysis of a single sub-national electoral unit over a period of about a decade, it will focus mostly on the second kind of nationalization, dynamic nationalization.

Essentially, this paper will argue that dynamic nationalization has changed the way in which New Hampshire elections are fought and won. Where once the Republican Party had a strong electoral cushion in the state, due to the local political climate, elections fought on national issues increasingly produce results similar to those at the national level. State elections in New Hampshire are now largely determined by a national agenda set by the overall electoral climate. Issues like the economy and the Iraq War have dominated recent electoral contests to the detriment of local issues, even in gubernatorial and state legislative races. At the same time, discussions of local issues in New Hampshire almost invariably reflect national political discourses, as was the case in 2012 discussions of the Republican “War on Women.”

Agenda Setting and Turnout

The increasingly polarized political agenda has also resulted in a system that values turnout: the goal of political parties in modern New Hampshire is thus to set the electoral agenda favorably so as to maximize turnout among key constituencies while decreasing turnout among the opposition’s constituencies. In this formulation, “agenda setting” becomes the single most important aspect of political campaigning in New Hampshire.

⁵ Morgenstern et al. “Party Nationalization and Institutions” *The Journal of Politics* Vol. 71 Ed. 4 (Oct 2009) pg. 1322

Agenda setting in this context describes the ability of various actors to control the public discussion, e.g. which issues will be discussed in the public discourse, in what framework and to what extent. Recent scholarship has identified several different actors with a direct and powerful impact on the agenda: legislators, governors, the media, the president, and political parties all have some role in defining the political agenda for any given election. The relative ability of these actors to influence public discourse varies from issue-to-issue and election-to-election.⁶ This paper will work to identify the agenda for each of the four elections discussed. It will also seek to determine the effects of this agenda setting: who wins (and who loses) when certain issues dominate the public discussion?

In general, this paper finds that control of the agenda results in a boost to voter turnout in New Hampshire that often results in wave elections. The adoption of national issues, specifically the Iraq War and the lackluster economy, propelled state Democrats and Republicans to massive midterm victories in 2006 and 2010 respectively. The ability of the presidential election to shape the electoral discourse in 2008 and 2012, meanwhile, produced a similar turnout result in those years that ended with large Democratic victories at all levels in the state.

In 2006, 2008 and 2010, local issues were completely subsumed by larger discussions of national issues. These issues helped to boost turnout for the eventually victorious party. Resistance to the Iraq War, for instance, produced highly motivated voters on the Democratic side in 2006 and discouraged Republican voters from heading to the polls on election day. In 2010, economic concerns, the health care reform law known as Obamacare and the emergence of the so-called Tea Party movement depressed turnout among key Democratic constituencies and

⁶ Delshad, Ashlie. "Revisiting 'Who Influences Whom?' Agenda Setting on Biofuels" *Congress & the Presidency* Vol. 39 (2012)

motivated older, whiter voters to head to the polls. This produced a Republican tsunami up and down the ballot.

In 2012, local issues were framed by the national context. Although national narratives about the Republican “War on Women” resonated throughout the country, the presence of a social conservative majority in the State House informed voter concerns with GOP governance and brought the election back to the state level. In this way 2012 was also a nationalized election, despite the fact that the electoral discourse involved a focus on state politics, because state politics were understood through the prism of a national Democratic narrative.

This paper thus argues that New Hampshire’s wave elections from 2006 onward were largely caused by shifts in control of the agenda from party-to-party and election-to-election. Long term demographic changes in the state that increased the number of left-leaning voters overall allowed the Democrats to perform competitively in state elections, but only if the electoral discourse contained issues that motivated their core constituencies. Thus, proper agenda setting to increase friendly voter turnout and discourage voters of the other party became an even more crucial aspect of electoral strategy than in the past.

Basic Overview of New Hampshire

In order to properly discuss New Hampshire’s political shifts over the past decade, this paper will provide a quick review of relevant facts about the state and the state’s political system.

New Hampshire is a small state in the New England region of the United States, bordered by Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine and the Canadian province of Quebec. With a population of 1,323,459 as of 2013, it was ranked the 42nd most populous state overall. It is also ranked 46th in

total area, making it one of the smallest states in the U.S.⁷ Also known as the Granite State, New Hampshire's economy once relied on extractive natural resource industries including granite and northern timber. Additionally, factory towns like Manchester and Nashua provided a strong economic base where these natural resources and other products were turned into manufactured goods. In the modern era, the New Hampshire economy is dominated by high-tech manufacturing, tourism and healthcare.⁸ The economy is also profoundly different in the various regions of the state: the North Country, the poorest part of the state, is still dominated by extractive industries and prison jobs, while the state's wealthy Southern Tier boasts high levels of educational attainment and the well-paying, modern jobs that accompany it.⁹ The Southern Tier is also the most populous part of the state, tilting the state's demographics towards the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum. One heading in the annual "What is New Hampshire?" report by the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies hint at these demographics. It reads, "New Hampshire... older, wealthier, and born somewhere else."¹⁰ To this description, an observer of the state might add "whiter and better educated": more than 90% of the state population is white, while New Hampshire boasts some of the highest levels of educational attainment in the country (4th overall with high school degree or higher at 91.3%, 9th overall with bachelor's degree or higher at 32%.)

The state's political system is particularly unique and is unlike almost any other in the United States. The legislature, called the General Court, has 400 representatives and 24 senators, for a total of 424 legislators representing a population of about 1,323,000. Thus, New Hampshire Representatives in the lower chamber, the House, represent approximately 3000

⁷ <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/33000.html>

⁸ <http://stateimpact.npr.org/new-hampshire/tag/newhampshireeconomy/>

⁹ Barrick et al. *What is New Hampshire?* New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies (Sept 2013) pg. 10

¹⁰ Barrick et al. *What is New Hampshire?* New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies (Sept 2013) pg. 17

constituents. By comparison, the state of New York has 212 legislators in its state legislature, representing a population of 19,651,000, half as many representatives for a population 15 times as large. Each of the 150 assemblymen in the lower house, the State Assembly, thus represents approximately 131,006 people. It is clear from these statistics that New Hampshire's legislature is, at once, unimaginably huge (the fourth largest in the English-speaking world, behind the Parliaments of the United Kingdom and India and the Congress of the United States) and incomparably small (since each House Representative represents only a few thousand constituents.) This is in keeping with the "Town Meeting" spirit of New Hampshire governance, based on the extremely democratic model of town government prevalent throughout the region. There are several other important differences between the New Hampshire legislature and other state legislatures in the United States. For one, its size means that it's prone to constant change: according to Kevin Landrigan of the Nashua Telegraph, the legislature turns over by about a third every two years. The democratic nature of the House also means that New Hampshire sees a wide range of proposed legislation including extremes from both ends of the spectrum.¹¹

The state's executive branch has is fairly weak compared to those of other states. The governor, one of the lowest paid in the nation, is checked by the power of the 5 member executive council, which is involved in a number of decisions including appointments and awarding state contracts, and also holds veto power over the governor in some instances.¹² The judicial branch, too, is often considered beholden to the whims of the legislature, which at times (including the 2011-2012 biennium) has openly fought with the courts over a number of issues.

Despite its former reputation as a red state, New Hampshire actually tends towards moderate stances on a number of issues. Although the electorate is generally conservative with

¹¹ Landrigan, Kevin. Telephone interview, 4/22/14

¹² <http://www.nh.gov/nhinfo/stgovt.html>

regards to taxation and budgetary issues, it is liberal-to-moderate on social issues, partially because of a dearth of highly religious voters. This can be explained by a tendency for voters in the state towards “libertarian” stances in a number of areas, including social and economic issues.¹³ But recent demographic trends have changed the face of politics in the state, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

This paper essentially finds that the wave elections of the past decade in New Hampshire have been caused by several interlocking factors: demographic changes, the nationalization of state politics, shifting narrative control and successful turnout have resulted in large scale swings in the partisan composition of the New Hampshire government and its federal representation. The conclusion will seek to connect these factors to broader trends in modern American elections and applies the lessons that can be learned in New Hampshire to the national scale. Essentially, it finds that New Hampshire’s wave elections, and its newfound role as a swing state, result from the ideological polarization visible at all levels of politics in the United States.

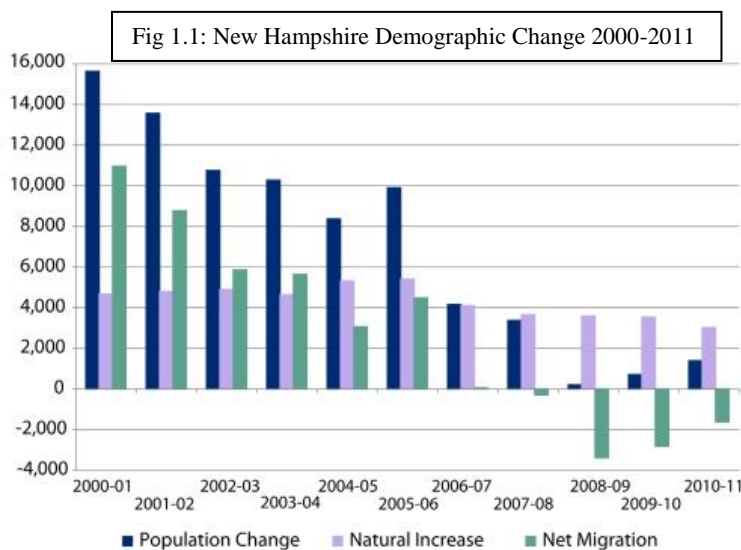
¹³ Smith, Andrew. Telephone interview, 5/1/14

Chapter 1: Politics in a Migrant State

This chapter will seek to analyze the political effects of migration on New Hampshire. The Granite State has long been reliant on in-migration, especially from Massachusetts, for its financial and human capital. These migratory patterns have also produced a stunning leftward shift in the electorate of the state, turning it from a reliable Republican stronghold in the 1960s to a key swing state by the 2000s. This chapter will therefore analyze the effects of changing migration patterns on New Hampshire, especially as they relate to the wave elections of the mid-2000s and early 2010s.

Recent Demographic Trends in the State of New Hampshire

New Hampshire is undergoing a long-term demographic shift that is changing the very face of the state. Although the Granite State has long been a destination for migrants, especially from Massachusetts, overall population change has slowed in the past decade, in part due to the influence of the Great Recession on migration patterns.



Source: Johnson, UNH Carsey Institute, 2012

New Hampshire is a state that has long been dependent on migration for its population growth. New Hampshire is the fastest growing of the six New England states, and only Maine had a higher rate of net migration from 2000-2010.¹⁴ Net in-migration, the excess of in-migrants over out-migrants, has been a strong driver of population growth in the state for decades. Despite

¹⁴ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends in the Twenty-First Century*, 2012 p. 5

the fact that net migration has been steadily decreasing since the 1970s, it still accounted for a majority of New Hampshire's population growth from the 1970s through the 1990s.¹⁵ The other major component of demographic change in the state is natural increase, or the excess of births over deaths. Natural increase has been on the decline since hitting a peak in the 1980s, largely due to a significant increase in the number of deaths and a slight decline in the number of births.¹⁶

By the second half of the 2000s, this trend of slowing migration had accelerated due to the influence of the recession. Despite the ongoing gradual decline of natural increase, net migration actually accounted for less than half of New Hampshire's overall population growth from 2000-2010.¹⁷ As shown in Fig 1.1, population growth in the state declined sharply in the second half of the decade, mostly due to fluctuations in net migration. In fact, net migration became negative beginning in 2007-08, and was only barely offset in 2008-09 by natural increase to produce an overall population gain.

This dramatic decrease in net migration is attributable to the influence of the Great Recession on migration patterns. From 2001-2005, before the recession, the vast majority of New Hampshire's in-migrants originated in the Boston Metro area.¹⁸ The fastest growing counties in New Hampshire, traditionally the southern counties on the periphery of the Boston Metro area including Rockingham and Strafford, largely rely on in-migration from more urbanized areas in Massachusetts for growth. Thus these counties suffered significant net migration slowdowns in 2008 and 2009 as a result of the recession and the housing market crash,

¹⁵ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends in the Twenty-First Century*, 2012, p. 7

¹⁶ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends in the Twenty-First Century*, 2012, p. 7

¹⁷ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends in the Twenty-First Century*, 2012, p. 7

¹⁸ Johnson, Kenneth. *The Changing Faces of New Hampshire*, 2007 p. 21

which essentially froze migration from the Boston metro area.¹⁹ New Hampshire's other traditional growth counties, including amenities-rich rural areas such as Belknap and Carroll, also experienced net migration losses after decades of positive net migration.²⁰ Other rural counties in the state, such as northern Coos county, also suffered growth slowdowns or losses. These slowdowns are comparable to larger national trends during the recession, which generally boosted the population of urban core counties (such as Boston's Suffolk County) and drained the populations of both rural and urban-periphery counties.²¹ This trend was well documented in the popular media: both the New Hampshire Union Leader and the New York Times ran articles in late 2011 documenting the national migration slow down, especially in the Sun Belt states but also in New Hampshire.²² Most analysts attributed the slowdown to trouble in the housing and job markets. Young people and middle aged adults with young families were unwilling or unable to move because they could not sell their homes in the stagnant housing market and couldn't be sure that they would be able to find a new job after they moved.²³

Essentially, fewer migrants moved to New Hampshire later in the decade while the same number of migrants left the state. These trends are visible in the IRS county-by-county migration data, summarized in Fig. 1.2 below. In 2000-2001, a total of 17,810 migrants came to New Hampshire from Massachusetts. By 2008-2009, at the height of the recession, there was a total in-migration of 9,891 people from Massachusetts to the Granite State, a decrease of 44.46%. By contrast, 8,854 people left New Hampshire in 2000-01, compared to 9,124 who left it in 2008-2009, only a 3.05% increase.

¹⁹ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends Reflect Impact of the Economic Recession*, 2010 p. 1

²⁰ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends Reflect Impact of the Economic Recession*, 2010 p. 2

²¹ Johnson, Kenneth. *New Hampshire Demographic Trends Reflect Impact of the Economic Recession*, 2010 p. 2

²² Namuo, Clynton. "State's population growth slows to trickle" *New Hampshire Union Leader* 2011

²³ Medina, Jennifer and Tavernise, Sabrina. "Economy Alters How Americans Are Moving" *New York Times* 2011

Maine, which unlike Massachusetts actually gained population in the exchange with New Hampshire, had somewhat different figures for migration during those time periods. In 2000-01, 3,181 people came to New Hampshire from Maine, compared to 2,897 in 08-09, a percent decrease of 8.9%. By contrast, 3,604 people left New Hampshire for Maine in 00-01, while 3,081 left in 08-09, a percent decrease of 14.5%. Vermont, the other state in northern New England, also had a different trend than the Massachusetts data. In 2000-01, 2,451 came to New Hampshire from Vermont, compared to 2,143 in 08-09, a 12.57% decrease. In the same time period, there was a 6.88% decrease in the number of out-migrants from New Hampshire to Vermont, from 2,311 to 2,152.

The overall numbers confirm this story: in total 46,493 people migrated to New Hampshire in 2000-01, compared to 32,081 in 2008-09, a decrease of almost 31%. By contrast, a net 35,812 left the state in 2000-01, while 34,401 left in 08-09, a slight decrease of about 4%. This data confirms that in-migration to New Hampshire slowed to a trickle in the later part of the decade, while out-migration remained essentially constant.

A large percentage of these migrants came from Massachusetts. Almost 40% of the 390,491 migrants to the state from 2000 to 2010 came from Massachusetts, dwarfing the number of migrants from any other state. Maine, the second largest source of in-migrants during that period, accounted for 7.46% of total migrants. Combined, the four other New England states (Maine, 7.46%; Vermont, 5.65%; Connecticut, 3.33%; Rhode Island, 1.49%) accounted for 17.93% of the total in-migration to New Hampshire in that period.

Fig 1.2: New Hampshire Migration Flows by State 2000-2010

Selected States N.H. State to State and Foreign Migration Patterns 2000 – 2010 IN-MIGRATION TO NEW HAMPSHIRE											
ST.											
FROM:	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	TOTAL
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
MA	17,810	18,796	19,048	18,444	17,980	16,284	12,826	11,940	9,891	10,097	153,116
ME	3,181	2,929	2,794	2,936	2,990	3,152	2,776	2,822	2,897	2,663	29,140
FL	2,456	2,434	2,704	2,095	2,274	2,472	2,362	2,628	2,380	2,051	23,856
VT	2,451	2,229	2,082	2,209	2,204	2,295	2,284	2,273	2,143	1,898	22,068
NY	2,479	2,096	1,854	1,885	1,927	2,063	1,878	1,840	1,782	1,543	19,347
CA	1,696	1,597	1,525	1,347	1,305	1,429	1,182	1,234	1,138	1,056	13,509
CT	1,518	1,306	1,351	1,407	1,305	1,425	1,357	1,286	1,111	926	12,992
FR	1,144	1,100	947	903	888	931	935	917	868	474	9,107
PA	1,102	916	799	730	821	822	731	740	685	585	7,931
NJ	1,039	813	878	750	819	875	735	660	621	531	7,721
VA	920	851	715	708	862	780	747	832	727	653	7,795
TX	1,026	887	702	611	693	668	664	689	699	593	7,232
NC	887	693	618	551	579	650	667	686	723	747	6,801
RI	663	523	616	555	637	682	577	579	540	468	5,840
CO	597	501	517	439	433	351	421	374	427	337	4,397
AZ	543	467	464	360	382	475	367	441	405	383	4,287
GA	535	459	389	362	415	387	409	433	378	364	4,131
SC	364	281	271	254	261	251	327	320	298	290	2,917
TOT**	46,493	44,495	42,873	41,294	41,372	40,779	35,815	35,456	32,081	29,833	390,491
Selected States N.H. State to State & Foreign Migration Patterns 2000 – 2010 OUT-MIGRATION FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE											
ST.											
TO:	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10	TOTAL
	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
MA	8,854	8,761	8,687	8,085	8,305	8,936	8,449	9,258	9,124	8,557	87,016
FL	4,030	4,633	4,638	5,798	5,769	4,924	4,102	3,632	3,216	3,557	44,299
ME	3,604	4,202	4,244	3,877	3,686	3,398	3,315	3,364	3,081	2,804	35,575
VT	2,311	2,243	2,150	2,207	2,197	2,223	2,174	2,174	2,152	2,053	21,884
NY	1,582	1,712	1,768	1,745	1,628	1,774	1,689	1,690	1,665	1,361	16,614
CA	1,623	1,383	1,511	1,424	1,438	1,503	1,372	1,333	1,302	1,210	14,099
NC	900	966	956	1,208	1,384	1,685	1,726	1,631	1,211	1,008	12,675
VA	1,032	865	985	1,014	1,186	1,054	1,071	930	1,041	966	10,144
TX	975	866	843	1,001	1,022	1,004	1,039	1,090	1,052	993	9,885
CT	1,031	1,011	1,063	984	1,059	888	880	943	880	736	9,475
PA	910	912	899	869	820	876	820	739	755	665	8,265
FR	675	686	760	821	727	705	724	621	622	604	6,945
AZ	712	615	619	704	840	747	701	699	570	558	6,765
GA	532	560	598	660	607	662	605	557	550	512	5,843
SC	356	448	504	580	647	765	693	681	623	518	5,815
NJ	489	558	533	515	484	548	563	500	497	436	5,123
CO	555	512	474	530	502	499	494	537	526	454	5,083
RI	538	507	479	485	498	424	456	471	400	367	4,625
TOT**	35,812	36,644	37,021	38,107	38,726	38,543	36,113	36,340	34,401	32,162	363,869

TOT** = total migration from or to all locations, FR = foreign countries

Source: IRS Migration Data, NH Office of Energy and Planning <http://www.nh.gov/oep/data-center/population.htm>

Politics in a Migrant State

New Hampshire has traditionally been reliant on migrant flows for population and economic growth. A 2012 report by the New Hampshire Center for Public Policy found that New Hampshire's economy in the years before the recession had been based on three primary factors, including increased productivity (based on high levels of educational attainment), a resilient economy and consistent population growth, largely based on in-migration. This in-migration of well-educated, older workers buoyed the state economy and enabled high rates of economic growth in the state.²⁴ Even with the knowledge that New Hampshire has long been dependent on sizable in-migration for economic growth, however, the sheer volume of migrants over the past decade is simply stunning. Assuming no overlap between those migrating to and from the state from 2000-2010, a total of 754,360 migrants produced a net in-migration of only 26,622 over the past decade according to the IRS data in Fig 1.2. Despite the fact that some of these migrants almost certainly overlapped, these numbers are still extraordinarily high for a state with a population of only 1.3 million. As this paper will discuss below, these migrants tend to vote more reliably Democratic than current residents of the state, pushing New Hampshire leftward over the past decade.

²⁴ Barrick et al. *From Tailwind to Headwind: New Hampshire's Shifting Economic Trends* New Hampshire Center for Public Policy Studies (Sept 2012)

Fig 1.3: Republican Strength in Presidential Elections by County, 1960-2008

	1960-68	1968-76	1976-84	1984-92	1992-00	2000-08
Coos	-9	-6	-2	0	-3	-1
Grafton	8	5	2	-2	-2	-5
Sullivan	-3	-4	-5	-5	-1	-1
Cheshire	-1	-2	-3	-7	-6	-8
Carroll	22	17	11	7	5	3
Belknap	8	7	6	6	7	6
Merrimack	5	5	0	-2	-2	-2
Hillsborough	-7	-2	0	2	1	2
Strafford	-5	-6	-7	-7	-6	-5
Rockingham	6	0	0	1	2	3

Source: Scala, Carsey Institute, 2011

This, however, is only a continuation of a long-term trend. Since the 1960s, New Hampshire has been steadily moving from a solidly Republican state to a swing state and presidential bell weather. Fig 1.3 shows the performance of the Republican candidate for president by county from 1960 to 2008 in relation to his statewide performance. Thus, Fig 1.3 is essentially a measure of the rightward tilt (or “Republican Strength”) of each county relative to the state at large. The figures in this table are striking: Carroll County, which voted 22 points more Republican than the rest of the state in the 1960-68 period, voted only 3 points to the right of the state in 2000-08. Grafton County, 8 points to the right of the state in 1960-68, voted five points more Democratic than the state in 2000-08.

This shift is apparent in the contrast between the results of the 1960 and 2008 presidential elections. In 1960, New Hampshire voted for Richard Nixon over John F. Kennedy with 53.42% of the vote, besting Nixon’s national margin by just under four percent.²⁵²⁶ By 2008, presidential candidate John McCain lost New Hampshire with just 44.52% of the vote, actually

²⁵ <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=1960&fips=33&f=0&off=0&elect=0&minper=0>

²⁶ <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/data.php?year=1960&datatype=national&def=1&f=0&off=0&elect=0>

underperforming his national percentage by about one percentage point.²⁷²⁸ This five point shift to the left is emblematic of overall trends in the New Hampshire electorate, partly as a result of migration.

Even within the past decade, election results suggest that more registered Democrats have joined New Hampshire's electorate. In the 2000 presidential primary, a fairly competitive open primary on both sides of the aisle, 238,000 voters participated in the Republican primary, while only 154,000 voters participated in the Democratic primary.²⁹ By the 2008 election, another competitive open primary on both sides, the number of voters in the Republican primary decreased slightly to 234,141, a decrease of about 1.6%. By contrast, 283,482 people voted in the Democratic primary: an increase of just under 130,000 voters, or an astounding 84.08%.³⁰ In this light, it seems obvious that the past decade saw a massive increase in the number of left-leaning New Hampshire voters.

Popular opinion in New Hampshire seems to identify migration as a major source of the state's leftward political shift. In one letter to the *Nashua Telegraph*, dated May 5, 2009, a New Hampshire native complained that, "I have witnessed the steady liberalism of our state due in large measure to the migration of citizens [from Massachusetts.]"³¹ In another article that same month, another New Hampshire resident writes, "The Massachusetts migration [over the past 15 years] surged from a medium-sized stream to a torrent, bringing thousands of liberal Democrats into the state. Their kids are now of voting age and tend to vote heavily liberal."³²

²⁷ <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=2008&off=0&elect=0&fips=33&f=0>

²⁸ <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/data.php?year=2008&datatype=national&def=1&f=0&off=0&elect=0>

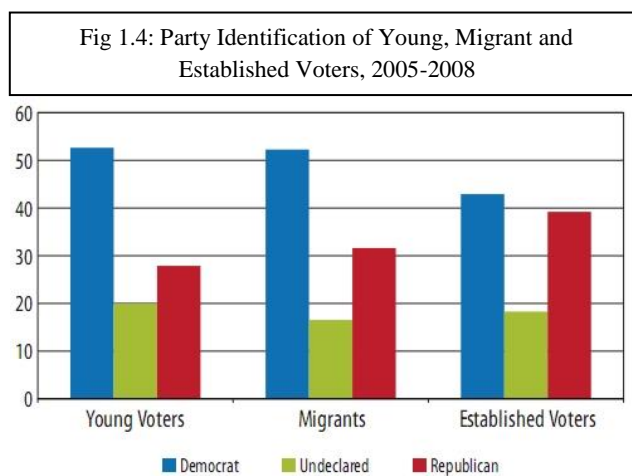
²⁹ <http://www.politics1.com/vote-nh.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/state/#NH>

³¹ Tebbetts, George. "Pro-income tax letter at heart of the problem" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2009

³² Scheerhoorn, Mark. "Sununu kidding himself on NH voting trends" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2009

The data also seems to confirm this theory. In a study released shortly before the 2008 election, analysts at the University of New Hampshire estimated that approximately 321,000 voters, roughly a third of those eligible to vote in



Source: Johnson et al., Carsey Institute, 2008

the state, had not voted in the state in 2000. Around two thirds of these voters were new migrants to the state since 2000: the remaining third were young voters from New Hampshire who had not been eligible to vote in 2000 and had turned 18 in the interim.³³ They found that these voters were far more likely to identify as Democrats than established voters who had lived and voted in the state since at least 2000. (Fig 1.4) Johnson et al. identify numerous possible causes for this. New migrants to the state tend to be wealthier and better educated than established residents and young voters.³⁴ Moreover, migrants and young voters tend to be clustered in the urban periphery counties in the southern tier of the state, the Sea Coast or the Connecticut River Valley. As shown in Fig 1.5, higher rates of net migration generally correlated with more Democratic voter registrations in the decade between the 1998 elections and the 2008 elections.³⁵ As Johnson et al. note, the correlation between net migration and Republican voter registration is not as clear cut. However, there is clearly a relationship between higher net migration and higher Democratic party registrations.

³³ Johnson et al., *Many New Voters Make the Granite State One to Watch in November 2008*, p. 1

³⁴ Johnson et al., *Many New Voters Make the Granite State One to Watch in November 2008* p. 2

³⁵ Johnson et al., *Many New Voters Make the Granite State One to Watch in November 2008* p. 3

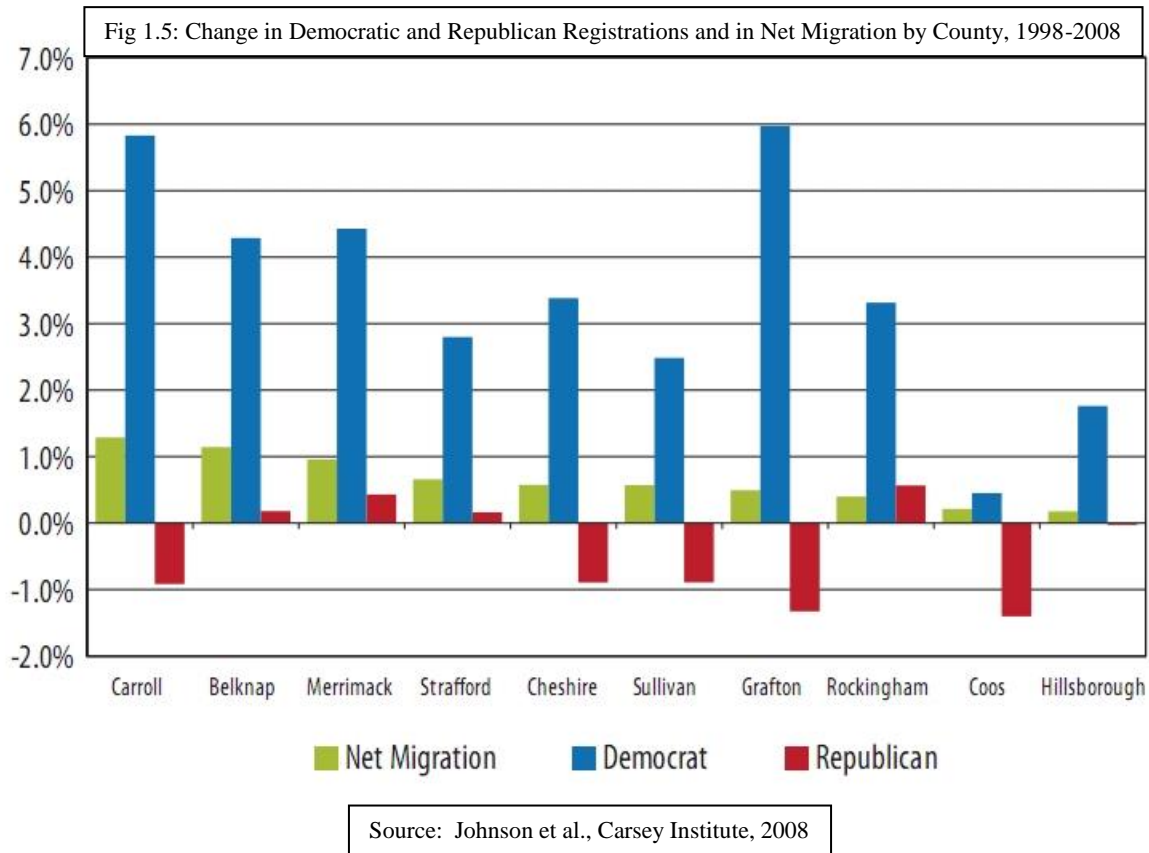


Fig 1.5 also seems to confirm that Democratic registrations significantly outpaced Republican registrations in the period between 1998-2008. This would appear to confirm popular perceptions of New Hampshire's migratory patterns. In-migration from the rest of the United States has shifted the Granite State to the left, causing it to turn from a reliably Republican stronghold to a national swing state. This shift has not been caused by the weakening of the Republican demographic base: instead, it has largely resulted from an influx of groups who traditionally vote Democrat. Thus, New Hampshire's long-standing migratory growth is a key cause of the state's recent political struggles, as more established conservative voters clash with new, more liberal migrants for control of state government. These trends, along with the nationalization of state politics discussed in later chapters, have been an important contributing factor in the wave elections of the past decade.

Chapter 2: All Politics is National in 2006

The 2006 election was a disaster for the Republican party at the state and national level. President Bush himself famously described the election as a “thumping,” and although he was likely referring to the federal election, his words accurately described the performance of New Hampshire’s Republican Party in the State House that year.³⁶ By contrast, the 2006 election was a perfect storm for the New Hampshire Democratic Party. For the first time in almost 100 years, the Democrats were able to win control over both the Executive and the Legislature simultaneously: the Governorship, Executive Council, House and Senate all came under Democratic control. Democratic ranks in the 400 member House of Representatives swelled by more than 50%, climbing from 149 to 237. The Democrats also picked up 6 seats in the 24 member Senate, establishing a Democratic majority of 14 members in that chamber. Meanwhile, incumbent Democratic Governor John Lynch won with a whopping 74% of the vote. These startling results were due, in part, to the demographic shift in the New Hampshire electorate discussed above. The leftward drift of the state electorate noted in the previous chapter increased the proportion of potential Democratic voters in the state, making it easier for the Democrats to assemble the necessary votes to win state elections. But the 2006 election was also one fought largely on national issues: it was, in many respects, a referendum on a national Republican Party bogged down by an unpopular president mired in the three-year old Iraq war and a series of scandals including one which broke in the weeks before the election. At the state level, this popular distaste for the Republican Party, the demographic shifts long underway and an enormously popular Democratic gubernatorial incumbent combined to suppress the Republican vote and boost the Democratic one.

³⁶ <http://www.cnn.com/2006/POLITICS/11/08/bush.transcript3/>

All Politics are National

Recent scholarly work has identified a strong connection between national partisan forces and the success or failure of candidates at the federal level, especially in U.S. House elections. This runs directly counter to the oft-repeated aphorism that “all politics is local,” made famous by former U.S. Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill. Put simply, this line of thought identifies all politics as national: elections are determined more on the basis of the national political environment than on the strength or weakness of the candidates in any given race.³⁷ This is the result of several interlocking factors.

Stone et al., in an analysis of the 2002 and 2006 elections, wrote that “...when a congressional election is ‘nationalized’ along partisan lines, or in reaction to an unpopular President... [that election is] characterized by a national ‘tide’ that works for challengers in the party benefiting from the tide and against incumbents in the party hurt by the national swing.”³⁸ They posit several specific mechanisms for this. First, high-quality challengers will be less likely to run against an incumbent in non-tidal year such as 2002, since the relative strength of the incumbent will severely decrease their chances of winning. The lack of a high-quality challenger will depress the turnout of voters who might otherwise have voted against the incumbent: thus, challenger deterrence is a key part of incumbent advantage. Secondly, high-quality challengers are far more likely to run in a “tidal” year such as 2006, because many incumbents decide to retire during these periods and those that remain are severely weakened by the national partisan atmosphere. Furthermore, the presence of a more legitimate challenger will encourage

³⁷ Stone, Walter et al. “All Politics is National?.” 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 29-September 2, 2007. Lecture. p.2

³⁸ Stone, Walter et al. “All Politics is National?.” 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 29-September 2, 2007. Lecture. p.3

dissatisfied voters, who will turn out in greater numbers to vote against the incumbent.³⁹ Thus the advantages to a challenger at the federal level during a partisan “tidal” year are powerful and self-supporting. These advantages are part of the mechanism that drives the nationalization of elections discussed in the introduction to this paper, and contribute to the idea that nationalization of electoral discourses increases the importance of turnout to electoral victories.

The overwhelmingly “tidal” character of the 2006 election was already becoming apparent during the final months of the contest in New Hampshire, as the national mood shifted against the White House and its policies. President George W. Bush’s approval ratings, which had steadily fallen in the aftermath of the post-9/11 surge and remained around 50% from early 2004 until late 2005, had dropped dramatically throughout 2006.⁴⁰ As of September, 2006, the president’s job approval rating stood at 36%, with 60% disapproval. This was remarkably close to several other key measures of presidential approval; his approval rating on the economy, which was 39% approval to 60% disapproval; his approval rating on foreign affairs, with 33% approval and 65% disapproval; and his handling of the situation in Iraq, with 34% approval and 62% disapproval.⁴¹ The polling data on each of these questions followed a similar trend throughout the second term of Bush’s presidency, ranging in the mid to low 40s in 2004 and 2005 before dipping into the high 30’s in late 2005 and 2006.⁴²

Disenchantment with the president’s handling of the war in Iraq was located by a number of analysts as a primary contributing factor to the Republican loss in the midterm elections, both nationally and in New Hampshire. It is clear from state polling data that enormous dissatisfaction with the president and his position on Iraq existed across broad segments of society. Figure 2.1

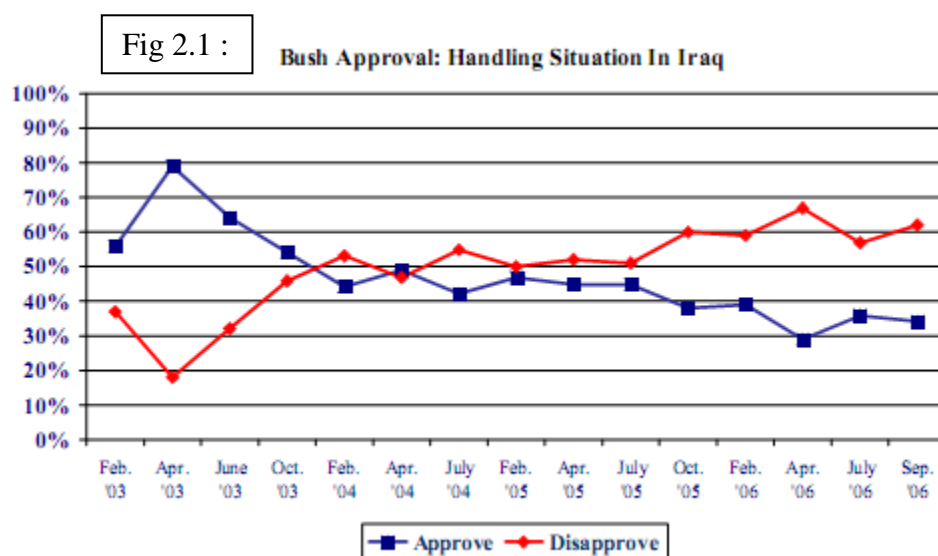
³⁹ Stone, Walter et al. “All Politics is National?.” 2007 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, August 29-September 2, 2007. Lecture. p.4

⁴⁰ Smith, Andrew, *Bush Approval Still Low Heading Toward November Elections*, 2006 p. 1

⁴¹ Smith, Andrew, *Bush Approval Still Low Heading Toward November Elections*, 2006 p. 6-7

⁴² Smith, Andrew, *Bush Approval Still Low Heading Toward November Elections*, 2006 p. 6-7

shows how the president's approval rating on the Iraq war, hovering just below 50 percent in the first half of his second term, began to drop dramatically in late 2005, presumably as the Democrats began to campaign on the issue. Democratic candidates at all levels targeted the Bush Administration's Iraq policy. For instance, in a campaign event with then-Senator Joe Biden, New Hampshire Democrat Paul Hodes criticized Republican Congressman Charlie Bass for failing to stand up against Bush and his policies in Iraq.⁴³



Source: Smith, Granite State Poll, 2006

Among voters surveyed by the UNH Survey Center on the day before the election, 77% of those who identified as Democrats, 66% of those who identified as independents, and 55% of those who identified as Republicans said that Iraq was “very important” to their congressional vote. When that number was expanded to include voters who said that Iraq was “somewhat important” to their vote, fully 94% of Democrats, 92% of independents, and 86% of Republicans cited Iraq as being important to their vote. These numbers held firm among core voters from each party and swing voters, with 95% of core Democrats and 86% of core Republicans, along

⁴³ Conaboy, Chelsea. “With Biden, Hodes blasts Iraq Strategy” *Concord Monitor* 2006

with 88% of swing voters identifying Iraq as a major electoral concern. These numbers remained astronomically high for all age groups, education levels and geographic locations in the poll.

The war's declining popularity ratings (support for the war had declined to 42% by September of 2006 while opposition to the war rose above 50% for the first time in the same month) imply that many of the voters most motivated by Iraq perceived it negatively, and that these perceptions were, by and large, based on partisan affiliation. Support for the war was highest among Republicans, with 81% of self-identified Republicans expressing support for the war, compared to 32% of independents and 11% of Democrats. Fully 85% of Democrats and 63% of independents opposed the war, joined by 15% of Republicans. Opposition to the war was also strong among women, with 61% of women and 47% of men opposed. Voters among all income levels, especially those making less than \$30k a year (61%) and those making between \$30k and \$60k a year (57%), were opposed to the conflict: similarly, voters at every level of education (except high school or less) opposed the war by margins of 50% or more.⁴⁴ These numbers were even stronger when respondents were asked about their approval of the president's handling of the war. 62% disapproved of the president's handling of Iraq, 8% more than the number of respondents who opposed the war generally. 93% of Democrats, 74% of independents, and 25% of Republicans disapproved of the president's handling of Iraq. 65% of women and 60% of men similarly disapproved of the president's actions in Iraq.⁴⁵ These numbers suggest that the president's handling of the war, and not just the war itself, was an important issue driving voters in the 2006 election. This connection between the unpopularity of the president and his handling of the war was evident throughout 2006: anti-war protestors

⁴⁴ Smith, Andrew, *Bush Approval Still Low Heading Toward November Elections*, 2006 p. 15

⁴⁵ Smith, Andrew, *Bush Approval Still Low Heading Toward November Elections*, 2006 p. 14

demonstrating in March held signs which read “The Bush Regime Lied to Us in Iraq-mire.”⁴⁶

Even the conservative New Hampshire Union Leader editorial page identified President Bush and his handling of the war as key parts of the Republican electoral rout.⁴⁷

This hypothesis is also supported by other data in the polling. When asked if the president himself was important to their vote, voters responded similarly: 89% of self-identified Democrats, 71% of independents and 76% of Republicans believed that President Bush was “very” or “somewhat” important to their vote. 91% of core Democrats, 79% of core Republicans, and 69% of swing voters said that the president was very or somewhat important to their vote. Among all age groups, these responses ranged in the high 70s, except for those 65 and older among whom 90% identified the president as “very” or “somewhat” important to their congressional vote. Similar majorities could be found among all education levels and geographic areas. Although these polls suggest that the president himself was less important to independent and swing voters than the Iraq war, the numbers still imply that the two congressional races were, at the very least, heavily influenced by the policies of the president.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the president’s long declining approval hit a low of 36% in September of 2006, with disapproval ratings soaring as high as 60%.⁴⁹ This suggests that many of those voters who thought the president was important to their vote viewed him negatively.

The negative narrative about the president and the Iraq war was almost certainly a conscious effort by the Democratic Party to tie individual House races and the Republican Party as a whole directly to the policies of President Bush in an effort to sink all three simultaneously. This was made especially clear in a May, 2006 report by pollster Irwin “Tubby” Harrison to Paul

⁴⁶ “Anti-war protest draws a crowd” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

⁴⁷ “EDITORIAL: What Happened? How the NH GOP lost” *New Hampshire Union Leader*, 2006

⁴⁸ Smith, Andrew, *Upset Likely in NH 2, Bradley to Hold NH 1*, 2006 p.14-15

⁴⁹ Smith, Andrew, *Bush Approval Still Low Heading Toward November Elections*, 2006 p. 6

Hodes, the Democratic challenger in New Hampshire's Second Congressional District. Using regression results Harrison found that, only seven months from the election, incumbent Republican Congressman Charlie Bass simply wasn't tied with issues like Iraq to the same extent as the president.⁵⁰ Harrison essentially suggested that the Hodes campaign would benefit by tying Congressman Bass directly to the president, which for voters would be akin to, “send[ing] a message to Bush’ by voting Democratic or for Hodes...”⁵¹ The success of such a strategy was clearly reflected later in the race: in September, Hodes overtook Bass to become the favorite in the race, which he would remain until his election in November.⁵²

The Hodes campaign seems to have taken this advice to heart, since a negative narrative tying Bass to Bush and the Iraq war can also be found throughout the latter stages of the election. The opening question of the Second Congressional District debate involved Iraq, and foreign policy concerns were a major part of the opening 20 minutes.⁵³ Similarly, the First Congressional District debate also involved a lengthy section on Iraq.⁵⁴ An article by Albert McKeon in the *Nashua Telegraph* shortly after the election summarized popular sentiment on Iraq as it related to the national level, saying, “Democrats swept to power largely because of the electorate’s desire to change the U.S. military’s direction in Iraq as soon as possible.”⁵⁵ Other contemporaneous letters and articles gave much the same assessment, including one submission to the editor which read, “For a change, ‘All politics was national.’ The dissatisfaction rather clearly was with Bush and his gang.”⁵⁶ These explanations were largely applied to the two contentious federal House races in New Hampshire.

⁵⁰ Brown, Clifford. Personal interview. 2/12/2014

⁵¹ Brown, Clifford. Personal interview. 2/12/2014

⁵² Smith, Andrew, *Upset Likely in NH 2, Bradley to Hold NH 1*, 2006 p. 2

⁵³ <http://www.c-span.org/video/?195120-1/new-hampshire-2nd-congressional-district>

⁵⁴ <http://www.c-span.org/video/?195137-1/new-hampshire-1st-congressional-district>

⁵⁵ McKeon, Albert. “Freshmen Dems ready to stir up change” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

⁵⁶ “How Republicans went wrong in election” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

Similarly, scandals in Washington contributed to a negative perception of the Republican Party in the lead-up to the election. The Foley scandal, which involved explicit text messages sent by then Republican Representative Mark Foley of Florida to congressional pages, broke in the final days of the election and, according to analyst Chris Cillizza, “cyrstallized voter concerns with GOP governance.”⁵⁷ The Foley scandal, along with the Abramoff lobbying scandal, which was also in the news in 2006, and the 2005 Delay scandal, formed a larger narrative about the corruption and bad governance policies of the Republican majority in Congress. This narrative was expressed by one letter to the editor, titled “Vote Republicans out of power,” which said, “More recently we have read about Mr. Delay and Mr. Abramoff and a number of others in government involved in the worst sort of corruption... Does the “G” [in GOP] stand for graft?”⁵⁸ Frustration with the Republican Congress likely compounded anger with the president, poisoning the national environment in the run up to the election. Felice Belman of the Concord Monitor perhaps summarized the nationalization of voter sentiment best by quoting two voters from Concord. She wrote, “Although President Bush’s name never appeared on yesterday’s ballot, many residents voted with relish – and gusto – against him. ‘I want to handcuff Bush,’ said Dave Teune, a Concord Republican who voted a straight Democratic ticket for the first time yesterday. ‘We gotta send a message to Bush,’ said John Hancock, 52 of Concord. ‘His incompetence at running the Iraq war borders on the criminal.’” Clearly, these voters are motivated by national issues above state issues. This represents a conscious attempt on the part of Democrats, both at the national and state level, to set the agenda favorably to encourage their voters and discourage Republican voters. By making the Iraq War the centerpiece of their campaign, a popular issue that resonated with voters in key Democratic

⁵⁷ Cillizza, Chris and Vandehei, Jim, “See how they won” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

⁵⁸ “Vote Republicans out of power” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

constituencies, even state level politicians were able to capitalize on the favorable national conditions set by this agenda.

State Level Rout

This is confirmed by the results of New Hampshire's elections, even at the state level. Analysts acknowledged in their pre and post-election coverage that the travails of the national Republican Party contributed to a sweep of state government by the Democrats. There are also other factors which contributed to the rout. Perhaps the most important of these factors was the immense popularity of the incumbent Democratic governor, John Lynch. *Union Leader* columnist John DiStaso excellently expressed Lynch's extraordinary popularity in a 2011 article, when he wrote, "John Lynch was, is, and will probably remain until the day he leaves office, the most popular governor in state history, or at least in the history of polling on such matters."⁵⁹ This was certainly true in 2006: Lynch won fully 74% of the vote, defeating his Republican opponent by a vote ratio of nearly 3:1.⁶⁰ Furthermore, Lynch's astronomically high approval ratings throughout the election meant that the gubernatorial contest was never in doubt. His approval ratings never dipped below 70% at any point during 2006, while his disapproval ratings stayed in the mid-single digits.⁶¹

Analysts cited a number of potential reasons for this personal popularity, including his personable style and his adept disaster response throughout his tenure.⁶² In 2006, however, many analysts cited his appropriation of the income tax issue as a key part of his success. New Hampshire lacks a broad-based state income tax, a policy that is exceptionally popular in the

⁵⁹ DiStaso, John. "Pundits concur: Gov. Lynch tops popularity list" *Union Leader*, 2011

⁶⁰ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/NH/>

⁶¹ Smith, Andrew. *Lynch Job Approval Stays High – Maintains Wide Lead in Gov. Race*, Granite State Poll, 2006 p.

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⁶² DiStaso, John. "Pundits concur: Gov. Lynch tops popularity list" *Union Leader*, 2011

state. Democratic candidates for governor had endorsed a state income tax as recently as 2002, when Democrat Mark Fernald was handily defeated by Republican Craig Benson.⁶³ A similar proposal in 1992 by Democrat Deborah “Arnie” Arnesen contributed to a loss for the Democrats, helping to establish the income tax issue as a losing one for Democrats. Lynch, however, in his first gubernatorial victory in 2004, turned the tables on the Republicans by pledging not to support a broad-based income tax, depriving the Republicans of a vital campaign weapon against him.⁶⁴ Thus, Lynch, the most prominent Democrat on the state ballot, was not perceived by the voting public to be a pro-tax candidate in 2006 (or at any point during his tenure). Republicans and right-wing New Hampshire political commentators repeatedly attempted to pin the income tax issue on to Lynch and Democrats in general, but found that their message was, in this case, largely ineffective.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Coburn’s attempts to saddle Lynch with the income tax issue, especially his attempts to introduce an anti-tax constitutional amendment (which Lynch had refused to support) at a special legislative session, failed due to a lack of GOP leadership support.⁶⁶ The inability of the state Republican Party to pin a pro-tax stigma on Lynch weakened their ability to control the narrative, especially since they lacked a credible platform on the other major issue of the election, namely state funding for education.

State funding for education has long been a contentious issue in New Hampshire. The state had provided approximately 5-10% of school costs at the primary level from 1920 to 1999.⁶⁷ In 1997, state judges ruled in *Claremont School District v Governor of New Hampshire*

⁶³ Landrigan, Kevin. “CONCORD – The New Hampshire Democratic Party didn’t fall into a bottomless pit after Tuesday’s devastating election returns. It only feels that way” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2002

⁶⁴ Landrigan, Kevin. “What went wrong for Benson, right for Lynch” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2004

⁶⁵ Boyce, Rob. “Vote for a Democrat is vote for income tax” *Concord Monitor* 2006

⁶⁶ Moskowitz, Eric. “GOP leaders back off, but Coburn vows amendment push” *Concord Monitor* 2006

⁶⁷ Oyebola Olabisi. *New Hampshire’s quest for a constitutionally adequate education*, New England Public Policy Center, 2006

that the state must provide more adequate funding for education. Following this ruling, a series of ideas meant to address the lack of school funding were proposed and failed, including proposals by both Governor Lynch and State House Republicans in 2006. By late September, 2006, Education funding topped the polls as the most important issue facing New Hampshire: 27% of respondents identified education funding, followed by 14% who identified taxes and 11% who identified the economy, as the most important issue for state government.⁶⁸ As one analyst wrote in the days following the election, the lack of a Republican platform on these issues and others stunted their candidates and facilitated a focus on national issues that resulted in a “thumpin” for the state party.⁶⁹ Republicans at all levels of state government simply could not turn the public discourse back to their winning issues: they were forced to talk about Iraq and governance issues, which put them at a severe disadvantage.

The combination of an unpopular war, run by an unpopular president leading an unpopular party, and an exceptionally strong Democratic governor with incredibly broad appeal already put New Hampshire Republicans at a severe disadvantage. This was further compounded by the lack of any viable Republican platform, since the traditional issues of taxes and education funding achieved no advantage in the contest. All of these factors, and the pre-election day scandals in congress, depressed enthusiasm among Republican voters and encouraged Democratic voters. On Nov. 6, 66% of those voters who planned to vote for their Democratic state representative said they were “extremely interested” in the election, compared to only 25% of those who planned to vote Republican and 8% who were undecided. Similarly, 50% of those who planned to vote Democrat said they would “definitely vote” the next day, compared to 35%

⁶⁸ Smith, Andrew. *Lynch Job Approval Stays High – Maintains Wide Lead in Gov. Race*, Granite State Poll, 2006 p. 3

⁶⁹ Mosca, Edward. “Anti-Income tax pledge no longer enough for N.H. Republicans to regain majority” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

of Republicans and 15% of independents.⁷⁰ The numbers were similar in the state Senate, where 68% of those who planned to vote Democrat were “extremely interested” in the election compared to 28% of Republicans and 4% of undecided voters: 52% of those voting for the Democrat said they would definitely vote, compared to 36% of those voting Republican and 12% of undecided voters.⁷¹ These numbers hint at a massive enthusiasm gap between Republicans and Democrats that crippled the Republican Party and enabled the massive Democratic wave. This gap was apparent as early as the September primary, with analysts correctly predicting that low turnout in the primary would reflect low Republican turnout in the general election, based mostly on lackluster Republican enthusiasm about national issues.⁷²

In that same Nov. 6 poll, the Democrats held the advantage in almost every geographical area. The Connecticut river valley was the strongest Democratic region, with 63% of respondents voting for a Democrat in the House and 66% in the Senate. Republicans were strongest on the Massachusetts border, the only geographic region they won of the six surveyed (North Country, Central/Lakes, Connecticut Valley, Mass Border, Seacoast and the Manchester Area): 46% of respondents on the Massachusetts border said they planned to vote for a Republican state representative (compared to 37% who chose the Democrat), while 47% planned to vote for a Republican state senator (compared to 40% who chose the Democrat). The Democrats held around a 10 point lead in every other geographic region for both the House and Senate, further suggesting the size and scope of the rout.⁷³

Additionally the use of straight-ticket voting, traditionally an advantage for Republican candidates, seems to have worked in the Democrat’s favor during the 2006 election. One analyst

⁷⁰ Smith, Andrew, *Upset Likely in NH 2, Bradley to Hold NH 1*, 2006 p. 9

⁷¹ Smith, Andrew, *Upset Likely in NH 2, Bradley to Hold NH 1*, 2006 p. 10

⁷² Landrigan, Kevin. “Low voter turnout could smack GOP” *Nashua Telegraph* 2006

⁷³ Landrigan, Kevin. “Low voter turnout could smack GOP” *Nashua* 9-10

noted that, "...voters chose Democratic straight-ticket voting this time by at least a 60-40 percent margin in most communities. Some Democratic stronghold towns such as Durham reported a 9-1 advantage."⁷⁴ This is likely a result of the above-mentioned enthusiasm gap. More voters cast their ballots for Democratic candidates, especially the popular Governor Lynch at the top of the ticket, resulting in an enormous boost further down the ballot. As one analyst wrote of the 2006 election, "...Democratic partisans turned out in much greater numbers than their Republican counterparts. Even if the voters who showed up only focused on a high-profile congressional race, [straight ticket voting] made it easy for them to elect Democrats to offices up and down the ballot." This effect, however, would be short lived: once in office, the Democrats quickly scrapped straight ticket voting from state election law.⁷⁵

The 2006 election was therefore a "nationalized tidal" election year that allowed Democrats to capitalize effectively on the demographic shifts that were already pushing New Hampshire leftward. The general unpopularity of the Republican Party depressed Republican interest in the election, while simultaneously giving Democrats a winning message at the polls. The inability of the state Republican Party to separate itself from the national Party, and the unprecedented popularity of the Democratic gubernatorial candidate further exacerbated national trends, and allowed the Democrats to control the electoral narrative.

These factors, together, resulted in a stunning shift in the partisan composition of the state legislature that would not have been possible without active, nationalized agenda setting by both the state and national parties. The ability of the Democrats to maintain control of the electoral discourse would also become a key part of their continuing hold on power in the 2008 election.

⁷⁴ Landrigan, Kevin. "2006 Top Stories 3: Democrats make history" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2006

⁷⁵ <http://www.governing.com/topics/politics/Voting-the-Straight-Ticket-Sweep.html>

Chapter 3: “Hello Blue Hampshire”: The 2008 Election

The 2008 election was, by all accounts, another historic victory for state Democrats in New Hampshire. Although they lost 17 seats in the state House of Representatives they did not lose their majority in that chamber. Furthermore, the Democrats maintained their 14-member majority in the Senate, retained the executive, both members of the federal House and picked up a highly contested U.S. Senate seat all while winning the state, considered to be a “swing” or “battleground” state, for Democratic Presidential Candidate Barack Obama. Thus, although the results of the 2008 election were not nearly as dramatic as the waves of 2006, 2010 and 2012, it was still a critically important election at the state level. Nashua Telegraph columnist Kevin Landrigan described the event as such in his post-election coverage, saying,

“Consider these firsts for New Hampshire Democrats, which may be unmatched in any other state in Barack Obama-land. Jeanne Shaheen became the first woman in U.S. history to be elected both as a governor and a senator from her state. [Governor] John Lynch romped to the biggest third-election blowout victory in recorded New Hampshire history. Carol-Shea Porter and Paul Hodes won re-election to a second term [as U.S. Representatives], the first Democratic tandem to ever complete that daily double in New Hampshire. House Speaker Terie Norelli, D-Portsmouth, and Senate President Syltvia Larsen, D-Concord, presided over the first New Hampshire Legislature ever that has gone Democratic in two straight elections. Hilary Clinton is no doubt smiling broadly at word that the New Hampshire Senate became the first legislative body in American history with majority female representation – 13 women to 11 men. Don’t let the door hit you on the way out, Boys’ Club.”⁷⁶

There are a variety of factors which contributed to the continued success of the New Hampshire Democratic Party in 2008. The first and perhaps most important explanation was the presence of two incredibly strong candidates at the top of the ballot. Although Democrats had eliminated straight ticket voting by the 2008 election, the essentially unopposed incumbent Governor John Lynch maintained intense personal popularity, enough to win fully 70% of the

⁷⁶ Landrigan, Kevin. “Democrats Notch Firsts in NH” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2008

vote on election day, a margin of 290,487 votes.⁷⁷ Meanwhile then-Senator Barack Obama, who had traded the lead with McCain throughout the summer, managed to win every county in the state with 54% of the vote, a margin of 68,000 votes.⁷⁸ In the end, the strength of these two candidates undoubtedly helped to push the Democrats to a victory in New Hampshire.

Obama's electoral strength in particular seems to have been driven by dissatisfaction with the performance of outgoing President George W. Bush and the weakness of the U.S. economy, which began a tailspin with the subprime-mortgage crisis in 2007 and quickly spiraled into the most serious recession since the Great Depression. In fact, voters began to identify the economy as the most important issue facing New Hampshire for the first time in over a decade in early 2008. This shift from education funding to the economy greatly benefitted the Democrats in the state, since the bad economy was largely tied to the policies of the outgoing president (and not the Democratic Congress or the state legislature.)

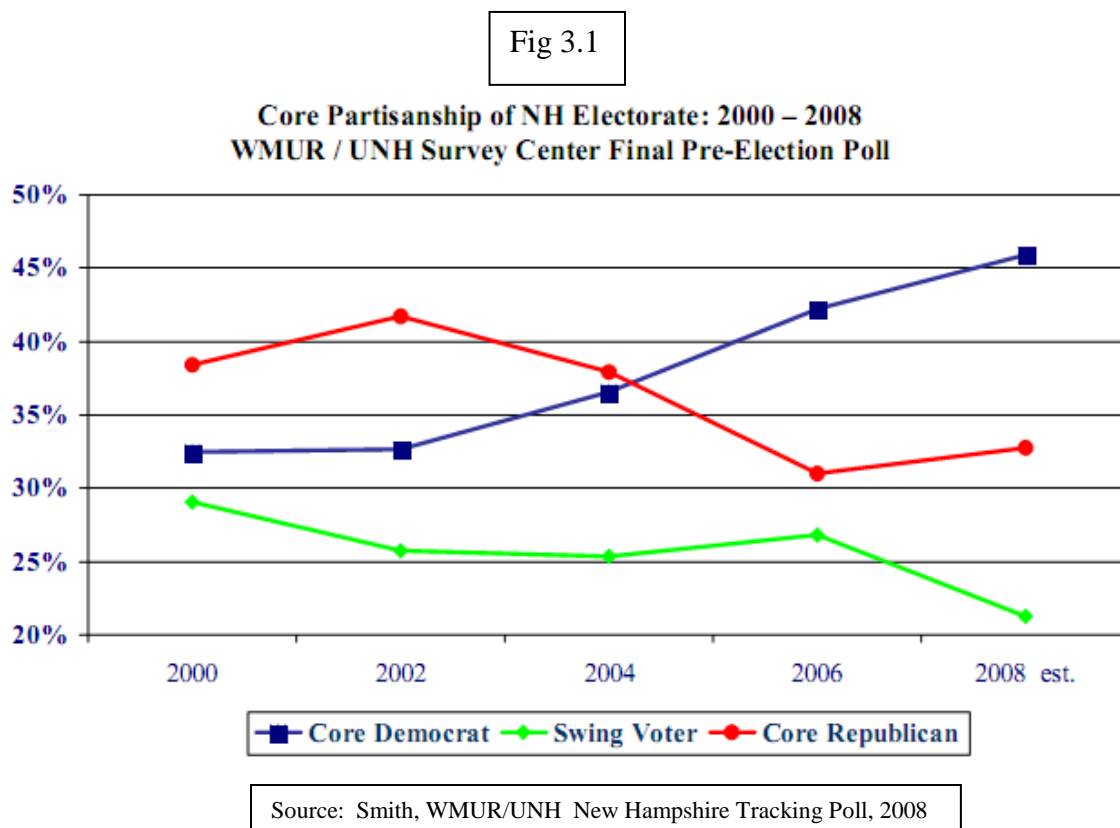
Finally, the Democratic state legislature had successfully managed to find a middle path in governing the state during the 2006-2008 biennium. They did not implement a statewide income tax or raise property taxes, and implemented popular initiatives such as raising the minimum wage and bringing New Hampshire into the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a cap-and-trade system in the Northeast.

These factors combined with the demographic shifts discussed earlier in the chapter to produce a stunning shift in the partisan composition of the state electorate, detailed in Figure 3.1 below. According to a November 2, 2008 pre-election poll by the UNH Survey Center, fully 46% of the estimated 2008 electorate were core Democratic supporters, compared to 33% who were core Republican supporters. This represented a dramatic shift from previous New

⁷⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/state/#NH>

⁷⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/state/#NH>

Hampshire elections. In 2000, core Democratic supporters had represented only 33% of the electorate, while Republicans had represented 38%.⁷⁹



In the final analysis, then, there were simply far more core Democratic supporters voting in the election, making it difficult if not impossible for the Republican party to win up or down the ballot in New Hampshire. This high Democratic turnout is closely tied to the demographic shifts mentioned above, but also to general enthusiasm about the election, which saw enormous overall turnout. The ability of the Democratic Party to control the narrative agenda, partially based on economic events outside the direct control of either party, proved crucial in supporting voter turnout, which resulted in the enormous number of Democratic supporters who turned out to the polls.

⁷⁹Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 3

The Presidential Contest

The 2008 presidential election pitted Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois against Sen. John McCain of Arizona. It was, by all accounts, a bitter and hotly contested campaign both nationally and in New Hampshire. Sen. Obama actually lost his primary in New Hampshire by two percentage points to Sen. Hilary Rodham-Clinton, while McCain beat former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney by five percentage points in the Republican contest.⁸⁰ Both primaries were hotly contested in the state.

Although the Obama campaign lost the state to Hillary Clinton by almost 8,000 votes or about 2%, there was a silver lining in the election results. According to CNN, 283,482 people voted in the Democratic primary, while only 234,141 voted in the Republican contest.⁸¹ This substantial difference, almost 50,000 voters, is consistent with the demographic trends discussed above. Larger numbers of Democratic voters enabled larger margins of victory and give a distinct advantage to any Democratic campaign that has a strong turnout operation.

In any case, the Obama campaign managed to pull off an impressive victory in the state, buoying other candidates further down the ballot. Following a close, unexpected loss in the primary only months before, Obama's statewide margin of victory was relatively high, with 54% to McCain's 45%, about the same as his national margin of 53% to 46%.⁸² Results at the county level were even more impressive and particularly illustrative of Obama's strength in New Hampshire. As shown in Figure 3.2 below, then-Senator Obama managed to carry every county in the state, including reliably red counties that voted for Republicans George W. Bush in 2004 and Mitt Romney in 2012, including Belknap (50% to 49%), Carroll (53% to 46%) and

⁸⁰ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/state/#val=NH>

⁸¹ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/state/#val=NH>

⁸² <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/president/>

Rockingham (50% to 49%). The margins of victory in traditionally Democratic counties including Strafford (60% to 39%), Cheshire (63% to 36%), Sullivan (59% to 40%) and Grafton (63% to 36%) were also extraordinarily high. These results suggest that the Democrats were able to draw unprecedented levels of support, both from their traditional bases of support and from reliably Republican strongholds.

Fig 3.2:

County	# of votes for Obama	# of votes for McCain	County	% of votes for Obama	% of votes for McCain
Belknap	16796	16402	Belknap	50%	49%
Carroll	15221	13387	Carroll	53%	46%
Cheshire	26971	15205	Cheshire	63%	36%
Coos	9697	6649	Coos	59%	40%
Grafton	31446	17687	Grafton	63%	36%
Hillsborough	104655	97087	Hillsborough	51%	48%
Merrimack	45078	34010	Merrimack	57%	43%
Rockingham	83723	81917	Rockingham	50%	49%
Strafford	37990	25021	Strafford	60%	39%
Sullivan	13249	9169	Sullivan	59%	40%

Source: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/state/#NH>

Obama maintained strong support across a number of demographics in a UNH poll two days before the election. He held leads among voters at all education levels, with especially strong support among those who identified as having “post-graduate” degrees (66% to 30%) and “high school or less” (50% to 43%.) He also had particularly strong support among the young, taking fully 64% of the 18-34 demographic to John McCain’s 35%. Obama also won every other age demographic, taking 50% or more of those aged 35-49, 50-64 and 65 and over. He also managed to win every income level with more than 50% support. Republican challenger John

McCain polled strongly among those voters who identified as more religious, with 57% of those who attend services once per week or more, and 51% of those who attend services 1-2 time a month favoring McCain over Obama. Obama, however, drew even stronger support from the less religious: 53% of those who attended services less often the 1-2 times a month, and fully 73% of those who never attended services broke for the Senator from Illinois. This excitement was tangible in coverage of the presidential race. One article, released just after the election, recalled the excitement of New Hampshire voters toward the candidate as early as 2006, declaring him a “Rock Star.”⁸³ “Obama-Mania has exploded across the country” read a different report in the Nashua Telegraph from 2006, which similarly compared Obama’s reception in the Granite State to that of a rock star.⁸⁴ In fact, Obama’s supposed rock star status was mentioned throughout the election by news analysts, both in support of and against the candidate.⁸⁵

Obama’s eventual victory seems to be in large part driven by voter concerns with the economy. As one analyst noted, McCain was competitive in the election as late as September, trading the lead with Obama throughout the summer. After the collapse of Lehman Brothers, however, the “bottom fell out” of the Republican campaign, as most voters blamed the Bush administration for the collapse.⁸⁶ A syndicated column by Froma Harrop, run in the Telegraph in October 2008, likened McCain’s economic program to the Bush economic program.⁸⁷ The Chairman of the state GOP, Fergus Cullen, noted in a post-election interview that Democrats had essentially turned the vote into a referendum on President Bush, and also the economy.⁸⁸ The primacy of the economy to the presidential contest is also clearly visible in the polling data. In a

⁸³ Schoenberg, Shira. “Lefty Handled New Hampshire Crowds” *Concord Monitor* 2008

⁸⁴ McDermott, Terry. “Obama-mania draws strength across political spectrumman” *Nashua Telegraph* 2006

⁸⁵ McFeatters, Ann. “Obama faces big challenges after convention” *Nashua Telegraph* 2008

⁸⁶ Smith, Andrew. Phone interview, 5/1/14

⁸⁷ Harrop, Froma. “McCain economic plan still Bush League” *Nashua Telegraph* 2008

⁸⁸ DiStaso, John. “Independents tip the scales in New Hampshire” *New Hampshire Union Leader* 2008

November 2 poll, fully 48% of respondents said that “the economy and jobs” was the single most important issue in their presidential vote, including 49% of Democrats, 48% of independents and 43% of Republicans. The second most cited issue in the survey, Iraq, which was a vitally important part of the 2006 midterm election as discussed above, was selected by only 10% of respondents as the most important issue in 2008.⁸⁹ The importance of the economy as an issue driving voter presidential choice held in the high 40s to low 50s across almost every category in the survey; men (46%) and women (48%); varying degrees of education, including high school or less (42%), some college (49%), college graduates (47%) and post-graduate degrees (49%); all age groups except the elderly, including 18-34 (53%), 35-49 (53%) and 50-64 (47%); all categories of income except those under \$30k a year; and every geographic region in New Hampshire.⁹⁰ Clearly, then, the economy was a crucial driver of the presidential contest in New Hampshire. Despite the efforts of the Union Leader editorial staff, voters associated McCain’s candidacy with the unpopular economic policies of the Bush administration.⁹¹ An extremely informal survey of small business owners by the Concord Monitor found that more of them favored Obama’s economic policies over McCain’s. One of these business owners, reflecting general sentiment, was quoted as saying, “There’s not enough room between Bush’s policies and McCain’s policies to put a piece of paper between them.”⁹² Furthermore, exit polling data suggests that those worried about economic conditions were more likely to vote for Obama: of the 91% of voters who were “worried about economic conditions,” fully 57% indicated that they voted for Obama.⁹³ As one analyst noted, “More than half of New Hampshire voters said they are very worried about the direction of the nation’s economy in the next year; they backed

⁸⁹ Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 9

⁹⁰ Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 9

⁹¹ “EDITORIAL: Vote McCain; For real change” *New Hampshire Union Leader* 2008

⁹² Schoenberg, Shira. “Their votes are their business” *Concord Monitor* 2008

⁹³ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=NHP00p2>

Obama 2-1.”⁹⁴ One letter to the Concord Monitor, titled “Middle class? Vote Obama,” made a similar argument, saying that those concerned with the economy and the middle class should vote for Obama.⁹⁵ This discourse was undoubtedly a large part of Obama’s victory in the state.

The extent to which economic concerns had an effect further down the ballot is more complicated to determine. Separate from surveys concerning the presidential contest, the economy was clearly identified in other polls as the most important problem facing not just the United States but New Hampshire itself. Having overtaken state education funding as voter’s primary concern late in 2007, by September 2008, 30% of survey respondents identified “jobs and the economy” as the most important problem facing New Hampshire.⁹⁶ This seems to have been driven, at least in part, by a strong Democratic focus on national economic issues led by the top of the ticket. At one Obama campaign event in New Hampshire, Vice Presidential Candidate Joe Biden talked almost entirely about the economy, blaming the Republicans for the downturn and boosting his own ticket’s platform on the issue.⁹⁷ Other key measures of consumer confidence began to drop precipitously in the months before the election as the national economy entered a downturn. When asked in a July, 2008 poll if there would be economic “good times” or “bad times” over the next year, 59% of respondents indicated that they thought there would be “bad times,” up from 31% in late 2007.⁹⁸ Similarly, 60% of respondents in the same poll indicated that their family was worse off financially than a year before, up from 32% in September of 2007.⁹⁹ Despite this focus on jobs and the economy, however, 73% of respondents said that New Hampshire was “going in the right direction,” compared to only 17% of those who

⁹⁴ Smith, Ashley. “Economy top issue for many at polls” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2008

⁹⁵ Thomas, Bob. “Middle class? Vote Obama” *Concord Monitor* 2008

⁹⁶ Smith, Andrew. *Lynch Heading Toward Reelection, Economy Top NH Concern*, 2008 p. 10

⁹⁷ Langley, Karen. “Economy, economy, economy” *Concord Monitor* 2008

⁹⁸ Smith, Andrew. *Consumer Confidence in NH Continues to Slip*. 2008, p. 7

⁹⁹ Smith, Andrew. *Consumer Confidence in NH Continues to Slip*. 2008, p. 8

believed the state to be “on the wrong track.”¹⁰⁰ This result suggests that New Hampshire voters, while certainly concerned about their personal economic prospects, were perhaps motivated by nationalized concerns about the economy more directly than by personal financial woes.

The success of the president-elect was also driven by voter fatigue, specifically with the outgoing President George W. Bush. President Bush hit his lowest favorability ratings in New Hampshire in the run-up to the election, as low as 24% in October, 2008. Fully 66% of those surveyed in the same poll viewed the president unfavorably: similarly, only 24% approved of his handling of the economy, with 70% disapproving.¹⁰¹ The impact of the president and his policies on the election is hard to overstate, and is visible in the anecdotal evidence as well. A number of voters interviewed after voting by the Nashua Telegraph, including several self-identified Republicans, cited the policies of the Bush administration and a desire for “change” as the determining factor for their Democratic votes up and down the ballot.¹⁰²

These results are supported by social science research into the relationship between economics and voter choice. Robert Erikson cites a number of other researchers in his work detailing the connection between the economy and the result of the 2008 election. What he finds, by and large, is that voters often vote based on their perceptions of the economy. Campaigns play an enormous part in framing these perceptions: Erikson notes that voter perceptions of the economy, which were extremely important to their presidential vote by election day, generally haven’t formed even half a year before the election. These perceptions were also based on social factors, such as public opinion and campaign information, more than personal pocketbook issues. Moreover, economically motivated voters tended to come from the least informed part of the electorate, and tended to blame the party in power, resulting in partisan swings in voting

¹⁰⁰ Smith, Andrew. *Lynch Heading Toward Reelection, Economy Top NH Concern*, 2008, p. 9

¹⁰¹ Smith, Andrew. *Bush Heading out of Office with Dismal Approval Ratings in NH*, 2008 p. 2

¹⁰² “NH Voters Speak” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2008

behavior.¹⁰³ This closely mirrors the result of the 2008 New Hampshire election. Although voters were generally optimistic about the New Hampshire economy (and, by extension, their own personal and family financial conditions) by the 2008 election, nationalized concerns about the economy and the campaign rhetoric of Democrats from the presidential ticket to the State House pushed voters into the Democratic camp.

Lynch's Landslide

In addition to Obama, the Democrats were aided by another popular figure at the top of the ballot. John Lynch, then an incumbent running for his third two-year term as governor of New Hampshire, won his race by an even more significant margin with a 70%-28% victory over his relatively unknown Republican opponent, Joe Kenney.¹⁰⁴ Buoyed by his soaring popularity, Lynch's support across the potential electorate in a pre-election UNH poll was, like the previous Lynch campaign in 2006, simply astounding. Only 50% of core Republican voters said they would cast their vote for Kenney, with fully 30% of core Republicans, 64% of swing voters and 95% of core Democrats favoring Lynch instead. Lynch maintained margins of 60% or greater at every level of education, every age group, both genders, every income level, every level of religiosity (except for those who attend services once or more per week, who only favored him 56% to 30%) and all geographic regions.¹⁰⁵ Lynch was so popular that he won his primary with a nine-to-one advantage, and by the end of his primary had raised \$1.2 million compared to his Republican opponent's \$85,000.¹⁰⁶ These levels of support are stunning, and almost certainly contributed to the success of other Democrats in the election. However, the difference between

¹⁰³ Erikson, Robert S. "The American Voter and the Economy, 2008" PS: Political Science & Politics (July 2008) Vol. 42 Ed. 3 p. 467-470

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/state/#NH>

¹⁰⁵ Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 11

¹⁰⁶ Fahey, Tom. "Lynch crushes Forry, to meet Kenney in November" *New Hampshire Union Leader* 2008

Obama's margin of victory and Lynch's landslide implies that at least some voters split their ticket at the top of the ballot. "I think [Lynch]'s great," gushed one such voter in a Concord Monitor article, "I pretty much stick with the Republican ticket, but he'll get my vote."¹⁰⁷

The issues that drove the gubernatorial contest were similar to those that drove the presidential race in New Hampshire, but with considerably less emphasis on jobs and the economy. In a November 2 survey by the UNH survey center, only 25% of respondents identified jobs and the economy as the most important issue driving their vote for governor. 22% identified taxes as their most important issue, while 13% said the state budget, 15% identified state funding for education and 6% cited healthcare as the driving factor behind their vote. Concern about the economy was highest among those making less than \$30,000 a year (at 36%) and those making \$75,000-100,000 a year (37%). It was also high among those aged 18-34 and 35-49, at 32%. Furthermore, Democrats cited the economy as a key driver of their gubernatorial vote more often than Republicans: 31% of core Democrats and 25% of swing voters cited the economy as the single most important issue in their gubernatorial vote, compared to only 18% of core Republican voters. By another measure, fully 38% of self-identified independents cited the economy as a top issue in their gubernatorial vote, compared to only 28% of self-identified Democrats and 19% of Republicans.¹⁰⁸ This is a clear indication that, although the economy was failing nationally, it wasn't the singular issue of New Hampshire's state level elections. This was undoubtedly influenced by an October decision by the New Hampshire Supreme Court which pushed the school funding issue back into the public spotlight in the buildup to the election.¹⁰⁹

A number of other factors helped Lynch breeze into a third term. He vastly outspent his opponent, as much as 16-1, while Kenney lacked a staff for much of the campaign. The governor

¹⁰⁷ Barrick, Daniel. "In muddy season, Lynch stays clean" *Concord Monitor* 2008

¹⁰⁸ Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 12

¹⁰⁹ Heckman, Meg. "Court leaves education funding to legislators" *Concord Monitor* 2008

also managed to pass a number of popular initiatives with the Democratic legislature during the 2006-2008 biennium, including New Hampshire's first minimum wage increase in over a decade and entering into the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a Northeastern regional cap-and-trade regimen. Importantly, the Governor managed to do so without instituting any sort of broad-based tax.¹¹⁰ These popular initiatives bolstered Lynch's electoral base without alienating New Hampshire's many anti-tax residents, an incredibly effective strategy for any candidate in the state. In the words of one older Democrat, who voted against Obama and senatorial candidate Jeanne Shaheen but voted for Lynch, "[Gov. Lynch's] opinions are never radical and he always seems to do what's best for the people."¹¹¹ The presence of an incredibly popular incumbent governor at the top of the ticket thus boosted the Democratic vote, while Lynch's moderate stance on issues like the income tax denied Republicans a strong counter narrative to use against him.

Keeping the State House

The Democratic majority in the State House also played a part in this victory. Although not as dramatic as the successes of John Lynch and Barack Obama, the actions of the Democratic majority denied the state GOP a chance to localize the election and separate themselves from President Bush and the national Republican Party.

In a November 2 poll from the UNH Survey Center, Democrats maintained an almost 10 point lead in the generic State House ballot. The demographic breakdown more closely resembled Barack Obama's margins than John Lynch's. Generally, Democrats maintained support among traditionally blue constituencies: women (50%-31%); high levels of education

¹¹⁰ Landrigan, Kevin. "Gov. Lynch easily wins third term" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2008

¹¹¹ "NH Voters Speak" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2008

(58%-23% at the post-graduate level); the young (54%-27%); the poor (54% to 31% of those making less than \$30,000 a year); the less religious (56%-24% among those who never attended services and 45%-32% among those who attended less often than 1-2 times a month); and the Seacoast (56%-24%) and Connecticut Valley (50%-33%) regions. Republican support was also stronger among traditional GOP-aligned groups, including the more religious and the Massachusetts border region. The Republicans maintained a slight lead among college graduates (42%-39%) and those who had lived in New Hampshire 10 years or less (42%-40%).¹¹² Although this statistic might seem to contradict the finding that migrants tend to vote more Democratic than more established voters, it is worth noting that this is a poll among likely voters, which generally skew more to the right. It is also worth noting that this finding is within the poll's 3.4% margin of error.

The Democratic advantage in the state Senate was similarly built on a traditional base of Democratic support from many of the same groups, including; women (53%-30%); the highly educated (63%-24% at the post-graduate level); the young (59%-28%); the poor (50%-29% of those making less than \$30,000 a year); the less religious (60%-23% among those who never attended services and 46%-33% among those who attended less often than 1-2 times a month; and the Seacoast (57%-26%) and Connecticut Valley (55%-29%) regions. Once again, Republicans found their most support along the Massachusetts border and amongst the most religious, while winning college graduates (43%-42%).¹¹³

These results essentially suggest that the Democrats maintained their majority by not alienating any major part of their traditional base, while maintaining respectable 10-15 point leads among other parts of the electorate. This was enabled in part by the actions of the

¹¹² Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 15

¹¹³ Smith, Andrew, *Obama to Win NH! Shaheen Still Leads Senate Race*, 2008 p. 16

Democratic leadership, which managed to keep the more liberal wing of the party from bringing divisive or politically dangerous issues into the public discussion. Kevin Landrigan summarized this strategy in an interview, saying,

“I think [the Democrats were able to maintain their majority in the State House] because they governed to the middle. They, with John Lynch at the helm, they didn’t present a scary option that Republicans could pounce on and gain advantage of. Their leadership in the corner office and in the legislature talked a lot of very liberal legislators away from even sponsoring bills like income tax, recycling law, things that were seen as too “left” to be acceptable. I think they showed a lot of discipline.”¹¹⁴

A number of analysts cited the importance of this discipline to the Democratic success. Although there were a number of contentious issues at the state level, the Republicans lacked a wedge issue (like a state-wide income or sales tax) to clearly define themselves in opposition to the Democrats.¹¹⁵ This exacerbated already existing Republican problems with voter turnout and enthusiasm in the 2008 election. Although it did not sink Republican electoral hopes entirely on its own, state level issues failed to produce any avenue for the state GOP to distance itself from the president’s poor popularity ratings and the economy.

Thus, the 2008 election remained a national one fought largely on the economic record of the outgoing President Bush. This was highly advantageous ground for state Democrats, who had largely managed to avoid major blunders and kept the focus on the national economic collapse.

In addition to actively focusing the discussion on Bush and his economic policies, the Democrats enhanced voter excitement with popular candidates at the top of the ticket, who likely contributed both to the incumbant advantage effects discussed in chapter 2 and the turnout effects discussed in the introduction. Therefore, agenda setting in the 2008 election was

¹¹⁴ Landrigan, Kevin. Phone interview. 4/22/14

¹¹⁵ Mosca, Edward. “State GOP guilty of only offering a paler shade of blue” *Nashua Telegraph* 2008

augmented by other advantages which similarly helped to boost turnout and resulted in a second consecutive victory for the New Hampshire Democratic Party.

Chapter 4: Red Tsunami in the 2010 Election

New Hampshire's 2010 election reversed the Democratic victories of 2006 and 2008. The state House and Senate switched hands and Republicans gained supermajorities in both chambers, with 298 Republican members in the House and 19 in the Senate. All five seats of the executive council, both federal representatives and a hotly contested Senate seat went to the GOP. John Lynch, historically one of the most popular governors in state history, was the only major Democratic state official to remain standing after the electoral tsunami of 2010.

Like the 2006 and 2008 elections, the 2010 contest was largely fought on national issues. Voter dissatisfaction with President Obama, especially reactions against the federal deficit and healthcare reform (known as the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare) drove high levels of Republican turnout unseen in the state since 2004. The emergence of the "Tea Party," a core group of Republican-leaning conservative voters, was simultaneously caused by and contributed to this high level of dissatisfaction with the president. A prolific national Senate race between Republican Kelly Ayotte and Democrat Paul Hodes to replace retiring Senator Judd Gregg and two contentious House races also added to the nationalized character of the race.

Voter concerns with the national economy further subsumed state-level issues. Although jobs and the economy remained the number one issue for voters in election polls, New Hampshire voters were generally split in their assessment. Most were relatively optimistic about the future of the state economy, while a majority were pessimistic about the national economic situation. This suggests that concerns about the economy which drove the election were largely national in nature.

Finally, Republicans managed to take full advantage of the conditions set for them by this national stage. Through successful candidate recruitment and get-out-the-vote operations, the

GOP pro-actively managed to boost their turnout and capitalize on voter anger towards the economy.

These realities were also, in large part, influenced by the regular dynamics of midterm elections. Generally, the party of the president tends to lose seats during midterm elections, regardless of which party currently holds the White House. According to Andrew Busch, the magnitude of these swings is largely determined by three factors: exposure, or the number of seats held by the president's party, especially those in unfavorable districts; the economy, or the general state of the country; and issues, particularly those related to the president's agenda. In 2010, all of these were against the Democrats. 2010 featured a number of Democratic incumbents with tough races in districts traditionally held by Republicans. The economy, of course, was particularly bad during this period, having not yet recovered nationally from the Great Recession. Finally, the issue agenda was distinctly unfavorable for Democrats from the get-go, with concerns about federal health care reform and the deficit topping the agenda. Taken together, these factors contributed mightily to the Republican wave of 2010, both nationally and in New Hampshire.¹¹⁶

Republican Voter Turnout and the Tea Party

The Republican victory was driven in large part by the overwhelming turnout of Republican voters. Republicans are generally seen as having a structural advantage during midterm elections. Although there are notable exceptions to this rule, including the 2006 midterms which saw broad Democratic gains across the country, older and whiter voters turn out in higher numbers during midterm elections and these groups generally favor Republican candidates. Presidential year voters are usually younger and more diverse than midterm

¹¹⁶ Busch, Andrew E. "The 2010 Midterm Elections: An Overview" The Forum (2010) Vol 8. Ed. 2

electorates, and partisan polarization along racial and generational lines has only deepened as a result of the Obama presidency.¹¹⁷ Although race is not a particularly salient electoral indicator in New Hampshire (since the state population is over 90% white) age undoubtedly impacted the election.

According to exit polling from the New Hampshire 2010 Senate race, 50% of the electorate was aged 45-64, with another 19% aged 65 and older. Only 12% of the electorate was aged 18-29, and this was the only age category which broke for Democrat Paul Hodes, 51% to 46%. More than 60% of those aged 30-44, 45-64 and 65 and older voted for Republican Kelly Ayotte.¹¹⁸ According to exit polls from the gubernatorial race, even the popular Democratic Governor John Lynch managed to only squeak by in the older age categories. Although he won 18-29 year olds with 62% of the vote, he managed only 49% among those aged 30-44, 53% among 45-64 year olds, and 53% of those 65 and older. As in the Senate race, almost 70% of the electorate was over the age of 45, giving a strong advantage to Republican candidates. Self-identified conservatives outnumbered liberals by 38% to 20%, with 42% of the electorate identifying as moderate.¹¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, these are the demographics that identify most closely with the Tea Party movement. According to Maxwell and Parent, a poll conducted by Knowledge Networks showed that Tea Party members are more than 90% white. They tend to be older, generally over the age of 45, with the most supportive members over the age of 60. 85% identify as Christians, and tend to be more religious than non-Tea Party members.¹²⁰

This advantage certainly played into the Republican victory in the 2010 New Hampshire election, but the general enthusiasm of Republican voters in this cycle make it difficult to

¹¹⁷ <http://cookpolitical.com/story/5776>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#NHS00p1>

¹¹⁹ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#NHG00p1>

¹²⁰ Maxwell, Angie and Parent, Wayne. “*The Obama Trigger: Presidential Approval and Tea Party Membership*” Social Science Quarterly (December 2012) Vol. 93 Ed. 5

separate these structural factors from the other components of GOP success. It is clear, however, that Republican enthusiasm for the election was significantly higher than Democratic enthusiasm. This enthusiasm gap was markedly visible in a UNH/WMUR Election Poll in the days leading up to the election. The UNH poll, which identifies three measures of partisanship (party registration, self-identification, and “core support,” an index based on a combination of factors) showed strong Republican enthusiasm for voting by every measure. When asked how likely they were to vote in the election, registered Republicans led registered Democrats by 8 points, 80% to 72%; self-identification showed an 11 point gap, with Republicans up 76% over 65% for Democrats; and core Republicans led core Democrats by fully 15 points, 83% to 68%.¹²¹

The UNH poll also asked voters about their level of excitement regarding the outcome of the election. This measure also shows a distinct Republican enthusiasm advantage in the buildup to the election: 72% of registered Republicans, 75% of self-identified Republicans, and 79% of Republican core supporters were “excited” about the results of the coming election compared to 45% of registered Democrats, 42% of self-identified Democrats and 41% of core Democrats. In general, these “excited” voters were Republican supporters or at the very least voting against the Democrats and the president: fully 67% of those who were “excited” about the electoral outcome disapproved of President Obama.¹²²

News analysts also noted this enthusiasm gap between Republican and Democratic voters, both before and after the election. Kevin Landrigan noted in his pre-election coverage that Republicans had impressive turnout across the country during special elections in 2009. Landrigan also noted that the enormous turnout in the Republican primary in September

¹²¹ Smith, Andrew. *Energized Republicans, Depressed Democrats in 2010*, 2010 p. 6

¹²² Smith, Andrew. *Energized Republicans, Depressed Democrats in 2010*, 2010 p. 8

suggested a high level of enthusiasm among GOP voters.¹²³ Audie Cornish of NPR found enthusiasm to be lacking amongst core Democratic constituencies, especially women.¹²⁴ Cornish found that women, a key part of Obama's 2008 coalition in New Hampshire (women made up 52% of the electorate, and voted 61% to 38% for Obama) were far less likely to be excited about or actively following the race.¹²⁵ Nate Silver, in his post-election coverage of the 2010 election, measured the "enthusiasm gap" using exit polls. Voters were asked who they had voted for in 2008, and Silver compared that margin to the actual 2008 results. He found that the voters in 2010 had voted for McCain in 2008 by a 4 point margin, while in the event Obama had won by 10 points, suggesting a 14 point gap between the voters in those two elections.¹²⁶ All of these anecdotes suggest that Republicans were more excited and energized about the 2010 election than Democrats. Combined with the data from the UNH election polls, it is clear that Republicans had a decided advantage in voter turnout during the 2010 election, despite demographic trends discussed in earlier chapters which favored the Democrats.

What Drives Turnout?

The root causes of this enthusiasm are varied and more difficult to determine. One of these was clearly the unpopularity of President Obama and his policies, specifically with regards to healthcare reform and the economy. The president's job and personal approval ratings had remained positive throughout 2009 and most of 2010. By September, however, both had dipped below his disapproval ratings. Obama's job approval numbers stood at 46% approval to 50% disapproval, while his personal favorability had slipped to 47% favorable and 48%

¹²³ Landrigan, Kevin. "Voters will decide which party gets upset" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2010

¹²⁴ <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=130477405>

¹²⁵ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/state/#NH>

¹²⁶ http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/11/04/enthusiasm-gap-was-largest-in-presidential-swing-states/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0

unfavorable.¹²⁷ More importantly, 41% of voters in New Hampshire polled by CNN indicated that their vote was meant to express “opposition to Obama,” compared to 22% who expressed support for the president and 35% who said that Obama was not a factor in their vote. Moreover, 58% of all voters held an unfavorable opinion of the Democratic Party, while 72% expressed general anger or dissatisfaction in their opinion of the federal government.¹²⁸ As one analyst wrote in post-election coverage, “New Hampshire exit polls revealed that nearly 9 of 10 voters said they were worried about the direction of the nation’s economy, four in 10 said the financial standing of their families had deteriorated in the past two years and close to half backed repeal of the health care reform law.”¹²⁹ This evidence suggests that turnout was largely driven by nationalized issues that, in 2010, favored the Republicans.

Voter dissatisfaction appears to be driven in part by declining approval ratings of the president’s signature healthcare reform legislation. Although it remained popular among Democrats, fully 49% of the state opposed the ACA in September, while only 38% supported the legislation. Approval of the legislation was largely tied to party identification. Only 6% of Republicans expressed support for the law, while 74% of Democrats and 33% of independents favored it.¹³⁰ Other anecdotal evidence also points to the importance of healthcare to the discourse of the 2010 New Hampshire election. Shortly after winning her primary election, Republican Kelly Ayotte made a statement to her supporters identifying Democrat Paul Hode’s votes on healthcare, the federal deficit, and the president’s stimulus policies as particular points of disagreement and contention for the general election campaign.¹³¹ The Union Leader, New Hampshire’s conservative newspaper, made sure that the issue remained near the top of voter’s

¹²⁷ Smith, Andrew. *Healthcare and Economy Drag Down Obama Approval Rating in NH*, UNH, 2010 p. 1-2

¹²⁸ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#val=NHS00p2>

¹²⁹ “NH Dems feel blue amid big sea of red” *Nashua Telegraph*, 2010

¹³⁰ Smith, Andrew. *Healthcare and Economy Drag Down Obama Approval Rating in NH*, UNH, 2010 p. 5

¹³¹ Landrigan, Kevin. “GOP’s Ayotte, Dems’ Hodes tell who foe is” *Nashua Telegraph* 2010

minds, with editorials like “The Obamacare myth; Keeping your coverage,” which heavily criticized the new health care reform law.¹³² A letter to the more liberal Concord Monitor wondered why Democrats weren’t defending Obamacare more vigorously, and identified “numerous articles and letters attacking the national medical policy enacted by the Obama administration.”¹³³

But it is clear that healthcare reform did not dominate the public debate during the 2010 New Hampshire election. Instead, it was dominated by discussion of economic issues, especially surrounding the lackluster economy and the federal deficit. The televised debates for the Senate contest between Ayotte and Hodes were heavily tilted toward economic issues.¹³⁴ One 1st district Congressional debate, between incumbent Democrat Carol Shea-Porter and Republican Frank Guinta, was also dominated by discussions of the economy and the deficit. The healthcare law was discussed for less than 10 minutes at the start of the debate, while the economy and the deficit dominated almost 40 minutes of the debate.¹³⁵ A 2nd District debate between Democrat Anne Kuster and Republican Charlie Bass was structured in much the same way, with emphasis on the deficit and the economy over healthcare.¹³⁶

Voter preoccupation with the economy was also apparent in the polling data. Fully 60% of those surveyed in exit polls from the 2010 Senate race said that the economy was the most important issue facing the country. Republican Kelly Ayotte won 59% of these voters, implying that those dissatisfied with the economy overwhelmingly favored Republican candidates.¹³⁷

Obama’s numbers in this area were also quite poor in the build up to the election. Presidential

¹³² “EDITORIAL: The Obamacare myth; Keeping your coverage” *New Hampshire Union Leader* 2010

¹³³ Lenaerts, John. “Democrats must defend health reform” *Concord Monitor* 2010

¹³⁴ <http://www.c-span.org/video/?296286-1/new-hampshire-senate-debate>

¹³⁵ <http://www.c-span.org/video/?295674-1/new-hampshire-1st-congressional-district-debate>

¹³⁶ <http://www.c-span.org/video/?296232-1/new-hampshire-2nd-congressional-district-debate>

¹³⁷ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#val=NHS00p2>

approval with regards to the economy dipped in the months leading up to election day, with 54% disapproval and 43% approval in September.¹³⁸ Voters and news analysts alike heaped blame on the Obama administration for the poor performance of the economy. One Union Leader editorial claimed that Obama's efforts to stimulate the economy had been a "dismal failure."¹³⁹

But the data also reveals an interesting gap in voter's perceptions of the economy: the majority of voters identified the national economy as troubled, while the state economy received comparatively positive marks. New Hampshire voters polled about a month before the election were relatively positive about business conditions in New Hampshire, with 41% believing that New Hampshire businesses would face "good times" financially over the next 12 months, 33% foreseeing "bad times" and 26% predicting mixed times. The number of voters predicting economic bad times had spiked in 2008 and 2009 during the height of the recession, reaching more than 70% in spring 2009. This number trended downward in 2009 and 2010, dropping to one of its lowest points since the beginning of the recession at the time of the survey.¹⁴⁰

Republicans and independents were most concerned about the state of the economy in these surveys, while 61% of Democrats thought there would be "good times" for businesses in New Hampshire over the next 12 months. The male and female breakdown was precisely identical to the overall breakdown, with 41% predicting good times, 26% predicting mixed times and 33% predicting bad times for both men and women. Concern was highest among the least educated, with 49% of those with less than a high school education predicting bad times.¹⁴¹ These numbers are not decisive by any means: rather, they suggest an optimism or at least ambivalence towards New Hampshire's state economy. Although the economy remained rocky in the state by many

¹³⁸ Smith, Andrew. *Healthcare and Economy Drag Down Obama Approval Rating in NH*, UNH, 2010 p. 3-4

¹³⁹ "EDITORIAL: Epic failure; Obama's bad economic plan" *New Hampshire Union Leader* 2010

¹⁴⁰ Smith, Andrew. *NH Consumer Confidence Still Low*, UNH, 2010 p. 1

¹⁴¹ Smith, Andrew. *NH Consumer Confidence Still Low*, UNH, 2010 p. 13

indicators, New Hampshire's jobless rate was still far below the federal average in the build up to the election, which may have contributed to positive voter sentiment regarding the state economy.¹⁴²

By contrast, those surveyed were distinctly less optimistic about the state of the national economy. Only 32% predicted "good times" for businesses in the U.S. over the next 12 months, while 49% believed the country would have bad times and 24% believed it would have mixed times. The five year economic outlook numbers were also decidedly pessimistic: 45% of respondents expected depression and unemployment for the U.S. economy, compared to 21% who believed the economy was headed for good times and 35% who thought there would be a mix of good and bad conditions.¹⁴³ The breakdown was more pronounced in these questions. Fully 57% of Republicans and 53% of independents believed that businesses in United States were heading for bad times, while 50% of Democrats saw good times ahead. Similarly, 62% of "conservatives" and 38% of moderates predicted bad times, while 51% of liberals predicted good times. The middle aged were also more likely to identify bad times, with 51% of those from 35 to 49 and 43% of those aged 50 to 64 predicting bad national business conditions, compared to 40% of those aged 18 to 34 and 40% of those 65 and older who predicted bad times.¹⁴⁴

Clearly, then, voter concerns with the economy in 2010 revolved less around New Hampshire's state economy and were more focused on national economic conditions. These concerns were largely driven by conservative and Republican voters who were often acting against the policies of the president and the national Democratic Party. Thus, it was essentially national concern that drove high Republican turnout in the 2010 election. This ties in with the

¹⁴² Leubsdorf, Ben. "Tallying strength, weakness in N.H. economy" *Concord Monitor* 2010

¹⁴³ Smith, Andrew. *NH Consumer Confidence Still Low*, UNH, 2010 p. 2

¹⁴⁴ Smith, Andrew. *NH Consumer Confidence Still Low*, UNH, 2010 p. 14

work of Robert Erikson discussed in the last chapter: namely, that voters are driven more by social perceptions of the economy than by pocketbook issues.

The state GOP also attacked the Democratic leadership in the corner office and the legislature by invoking the state budget. Although 46% of those surveyed in an October 1st poll identified jobs and the economy as the top issue facing New Hampshire, the state budget was in second place, with 16% of those surveyed marking it the most important issue facing the state.¹⁴⁵ Concern about the state budget was more closely tied to party identification than even jobs and the economy: of registered Republicans, 28% expressed concerns about the state budget, while only 12% of registered undeclared identified it as the top issue facing the state. This focus was led in part by John Stephen, the Republican gubernatorial candidate, who relentlessly attacked Lynch on the his handling of taxes and the state budget: the gubernatorial debate, which included significant discussion of budget issues, was an excellent example of this strong focus on budgetary issues.¹⁴⁶ Criticisms regarding the budget did not draw as much interest in the election, however. Only 20% of those who identified the state budget as the most important issue said they were “extremely” interested in the election, compared with 44% who identified jobs and the economy as the top issue.¹⁴⁷ This suggests that voters were more motivated and enthusiastic about national economic issues than state budget battles.

The Tea Party and Electoral Discourse

These issues were part and parcel of the rhetorical framework developed by the so-called “Tea Party” during the 2010 election. The Tea Party emerged as a force advocating against continued government spending and tax increases. The Tea Party in New Hampshire took on a

¹⁴⁵ Smith, Andrew. *Lynch Remains Strong in Tough Year For Democrats*, UNH, 2010 p. 19

¹⁴⁶ Kittle, Cameron. “Debate last chance for governor candidates to make case to NH” *Nashua Telegraph* 2010

¹⁴⁷ Smith, Andrew. *Lynch Remains Strong in Tough Year For Democrats*, UNH, 2010 p. 19

very different identity compared to other elements of the movement nationally. According to Andrew Smith, the Tea Party was a varied and disunified grouping of conservative activists and voters.¹⁴⁸ It generally lacked central organization and structure. The Northeastern Tea Party (of which the New Hampshire Tea Party is a subset) tended towards libertarianism rather than social values conservatism, as in the South. Dante Scala identified the Tea Party as largely concerned with the preservation of constitutional values, against President Obama and against big government.¹⁴⁹

These values were especially apparent in the GOP gubernatorial primary. Candidate Jack Kimball, a self-professed founder of the Tea Party movement, identified over-taxation and excessive spending as areas of weakness in state policy.¹⁵⁰ Analysts noted Republican gubernatorial candidate John Stephen's focus on state budget issues as a key ingredient in Republican state-wide gains, helping change the public discourse favorably for Republicans.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, the new Republican leadership in the House and Senate also continued to talk about the primacy of financial issues even as their caucuses began to submit a host of bills on social issues (which would come back to haunt them in 2012.)¹⁵²

Although efforts to precisely define the Tea Party and its values are complicated by its decentralized nature, it is clear that those who identified with the Tea Party strongly backed Republican candidates at all levels of New Hampshire politics. In exit polling, 41% of those who voted in the gubernatorial race identified some level of support for the Tea Party. Of these voters, 78% supported Republican John Stephen. Among the 24% who strongly supported the Tea

¹⁴⁸ Smith, Andrew. Phone interview. 5/1/14

¹⁴⁹ Scala, Dante. Phone interview 5/8/14

¹⁵⁰ Kimball, Jack. "Kimball: Reduce tax burden of small business" *Nashua Telegraph* 2010

¹⁵¹ Landrigan, Kevin. "Stephen helped win, despite his own loss" *Nashua Telegraph* 2010

¹⁵² Landrigan, Kevin. "Model for success all up to the GOP" *Nashua Telegraph* 2010

Party, 86% voted for Stephen.¹⁵³ These numbers were even higher in the Senate race: of the 41% who supported the Tea Party, fully 92% voted for Republican Kelly Ayotte, while 97% of those who strongly supported the Tea Party voted for Ayotte.¹⁵⁴ These results held steady at the legislative level, too. 86% of those who supported the Tea Party in an October UNH poll planned to vote for Republican candidates in the House. Similarly, 88% of those who supported the Tea Party planned to vote for a Republican state senator.¹⁵⁵

These results illustrate the effect that the Tea Party had in shaping the 2010 election. Tea Party candidates largely expressed economic and fiscal concerns about the state of the country, which largely translated into support for Republican candidates up and down the ballot. Although a large percentage of the population did not identify with the Tea Party, their influence was still felt across the state and certainly contributed to the increased Republican turnout that led to the electoral wave.

As discussed above, the Tea Party largely draws strength from older, whiter and more religious voters. Ulbig and Macha argue that the Tea Party largely draws support from voters who feel alienated by the two party system and who feel that their issues are not being addressed by either the Democrats or the Republicans.¹⁵⁶ The movement draws mostly from libertarians, and thus is generally for reducing the size of government and against taxation and regulation. The Tea Party also contains reactionary elements worried about cultural and racial changes to the United States. Further, the Tea Party is a diffuse group of organizations that lack a coherent central leadership and is therefore subject to wide regional variation.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#val=NHG00p2>

¹⁵⁴ <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2010/results/polls/#val=NHS00p2>

¹⁵⁵ Smith, Andrew. *Republicans Lead in Generic Ballots for NH House and Senate*, UNH 2010 p. 4-5

¹⁵⁶ Ulbig, Stacy and Macha, Sarah. "It's Tea Time, but What Flavor?" *The American Review of Politics* Vol. 33 (2012) p. 98

¹⁵⁷ Ulbig, Stacy and Macha, Sarah. "It's Tea Time, but What Flavor?" *The American Review of Politics* Vol. 33 (2012) p. 99

Ulbis and Macha analyze these regional differences and find the Eastern Tea Party is overwhelmingly motivated by the economy and anti-government sentiment. In addition, they find that the wealthy in the East are generally less supportive of the movement.¹⁵⁸

However, New Hampshire's Tea Partiers are a clearly distinct phenomenon from this conception of the Eastern Tea Party. The movement in New Hampshire rarely mentions the economy at all. As with the broader movement, it offers few, if any, positive policy prescriptions because it is largely reactionary in nature.¹⁵⁹ There are several discursive aspects that uniquely define the New Hampshire Tea Party; a particularly strong focus on "globalist" conspiracy theories, especially those involving the U.N., the Federal Reserve and Communism; a distinct lack of discussion about the economy or taxes and spending; and a strong disgust with progressives and other left-wing activists and politicians. These appear to largely reflect the conspiracy minded, non-economic nature of the New Hampshire Tea Party: its members, by and large, were not concerned with the economic downturn directly in 2010. Instead, they pushed to shrink the size of government and defeat left-wing candidates, predicated on a world view that espoused globalist conspiracy theories recycled from the Cold War-era John Birch Society.¹⁶⁰ But, as shown above, most candidates who professed allegiance to the Tea Party publically declared their focus on the economy rather than these issues.

Thus, the 2010 election represented a reversal of fortune for the Democrats. National issues in 2006 and 2008 brought the state Republicans to their lowest point in over 100 years, burdened by an unpopular president and his unpopular wars abroad. In 2010, it was the Democrats who faced the brunt of voter frustration. Saddled with an incumbent president, a still-

¹⁵⁸ Ulbis, Stacy and Macha, Sarah. "It's Tea Time, but What Flavor?" *The American Review of Politics* Vol. 33 (2012) p. 110

¹⁵⁹ Harris, Lee. "The Tea Party vs. the Intellectuals." *Policy Review* (2010) p. 4

¹⁶⁰ See analysis of NHteapartycoalition.org in Appendix 1

declining economy and an increasingly unpopular healthcare reform law, Democrats in New Hampshire were unable to free themselves from the stigma attached to the national Democratic Party.

At the same time, state Republicans were able to take advantage of the favorable national environment by fielding enough candidates and avoiding major missteps. By harnessing voter frustration with the economy, they successfully nationalized the 2010 election and secured a whopping victory. The emergence of the Tea Party similarly encouraged turnout and voter excitement among traditional Republican constituencies in New Hampshire, and proved that Democratic demographic advantages in the state were blunted when Republicans controlled the electoral agenda. Without strong turnout boosted by this agenda control, Democrats could not manage to craft a winning electoral coalition as they did in 2006, 2008 and as they would do again in 2012.

Chapter 5: The 2012 Election: Women Lead the Way

The 2012 election saw the third wave election in four cycles, tipping back from Republican control to Democratic dominance. The Democrats more than doubled their numbers in the House to regain the majority, while picking up three of five seats on the Executive Council and cutting the Republican majority in the 24 member Senate from 19 to 13. Democrats also won back both federal House seats, and carried the state by a relatively comfortable margin for incumbent President Barack Obama. Finally, Democrat Maggie Hassan defeated Republican Ovide Lamontagne in the open gubernatorial race, rounding out an enormously successful year for New Hampshire Democrats up and down the ballot. It was not, however, a wave year for Democrats nationally. Although President Obama was reelected with a relatively significant margin nationally, the decennial redistricting process and the lack of a cohesive national narrative (apart from one regarding women's issues that is detailed below) kept Republicans in power both in the federal House of Representatives and in state houses across the nation.

As in the preceding elections, the Democrat's victory in New Hampshire was largely thanks to enormous turnout among key Democratic constituencies. Democratic-leaning voters, especially women, turned out in large numbers to strongly support the Party's candidates. This was, in part, a result of a national debate over the so-called Republican "war on women," painting the Republican Party as extreme on abortion and access to contraception. This messaging was led by the top of the ticket: the Obama campaign went to great lengths to paint Republican candidate Mitt Romney as anti-woman. But the criticism also applied to the state level, with Republican state legislators (led by Speaker Bill O'Brien) introducing a slew of conservative bills targeting women's reproductive rights during the 2010-11 session.

The issue of jobs and the economy remained the top concern identified by voters in surveys, but these concerns were largely focused at the national level. Voters continued to indicate consistently high levels of concern for the national economy, but lower levels of concern and even optimism regarding the state economy. Moreover, Obama's climbing approval ratings, boosted by relatively good economic news near the end of the election, helped stem the tide of voter anger that Republicans capitalized on in 2010.

This may be tied to the research of Robert Erikson discussed in previous chapters, which found that voter economic choice is largely defined by social trends rather than pocketbook issues. Although the New Hampshire economy had improved somewhat since the 2010 election, it was, more likely, voter perceptions of the economy that changed as opposed to actual voter pocketbook conditions.¹⁶¹

There was also some discussion during the election of Mitt Romney's inability to connect with middle class voters, epitomized by his infamous "47 percent" comments that were leaked in September, only weeks before the election.¹⁶² The importance of these comments and Obama's victory courting middle class voters undoubtedly contributed to the victory of the Democrats in New Hampshire, especially because most Americans (and also most New Hampshire voters) believed that Romney would be worse for almost every category of Americans except the wealthy.¹⁶³

Thus, the 2012 election was won in New Hampshire largely by appropriating national political discourse at the state level, especially about middle class values and social issues, that gave Democrats a decided turnout advantage.

¹⁶¹ Please see discussion in Chapter 2

¹⁶² <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/09/secret-video-romney-private-fundraiser>

¹⁶³ "GOP message in Romney's loss" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

Women and the 2012 Election

Women played a crucial role in the 2012 elections both nationally and in New Hampshire. The presence of a “gender gap” at both levels was extensively reported both during and after the election. Although polls consistently showed Republican Mitt Romney with a lead among white men, women regularly broke for Barack Obama by even wider margins across the country. Although the Obama campaign nationally relied on a coalition of youth, minority, and female voters to fuel its electoral success, the dearth of minority and youth voters in New Hampshire made Democratic victories there contingent on turning out women to vote blue.¹⁶⁴

Their efforts were undoubtedly successful in this regard. 52% of New Hampshire voters in 2012 were women, and they voted for Obama over Romney by 58% to 42%. Men, who represented only 48% of the electorate, broke for Romney over Obama by 51% to 47%, but this advantage was offset by the sheer size of Obama’s margins among women.¹⁶⁵ Democratic attempts to portray Romney as opposed to Planned Parenthood, birth control and access to abortion, were boosted by Romney’s own statements on the issue and general anger over the statements of other Republicans, including Missouri Rep. Todd Akin’s assertion that victims of “legitimate rape” don’t get pregnant.¹⁶⁶ This narrative about the extreme nature of Romney’s social policies undoubtedly contributed to the strong Democratic advantage among women. In a September, 2012 poll, 58% of voters said that Obama would be better for women, compared to 32% who indicated that Romney would be better for women. 55% of men and 60% of women identified Obama as being better for women in this survey, suggesting strong support in this area, especially among women.¹⁶⁷ In the final pre-election UNH poll, Obama led among women by

¹⁶⁴ Bouie, Jamelle, “*Red to Purple to Blue*” American Prospect (2013) Vol. 24 Ed. 1 p. 43

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/state/NH/president>

¹⁶⁶ Diaz, Kevin. “Both sides fight for women’s vote” *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁶⁷ Smith, Andrew. *NH Voters: Obama Better for Most Groups of Americans*, UNH 2012 p. 6

almost 57% to 39%, with a 50% overall lead. Although the majority of voters identified the economy as the most important issue in the presidential election, 83% of those who identified social issues as the second most important issue said they favored Obama.¹⁶⁸ This suggests that many voters were motivated by social issues, including women and women's issues, and that these voters favored the president over Mitt Romney.

These successes translated down the ballot, including in the two federal representative races. Carol Shea-Porter, Democratic candidate for the 1st Congressional District, maintained a margin of 48% to 29% among women in the final UNH pre-election poll, while her opponent Frank Guinta maintained a 51% to 33% lead among men.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, Democrat Annie Kuster maintained a 52% to 33% lead with women compared to her opponent Charlie Bass, who held a 47% to 39% margin among men.¹⁷⁰ This evidence supports the assertion of a gender gap in the federal level elections, and the eventual victory of the Democratic candidates implies that Democrats used the size of their margin among women to great advantage.

These same trends can be seen in the state level elections. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Maggie Hassan won amongst women with roughly the same margin as the president (60% to Ovide Lamontagne's 38%), and also won men by a small margin (49% to 48%).¹⁷¹ The state House and Senate saw a similar gender gap, with women favoring the Democrats (50% to 32% in the House and 52% to 34% in the Senate) and men favoring the Republicans (44% to 37% in the House and 44% to 35% in the Senate.)¹⁷² These gains are in part attributable to a narrative linking the Republican candidate with extreme social views, like one advertisement run by the Democratic Governor's Association in support of Hassan that accused Lamontagne of

¹⁶⁸ Smith, Andrew. *Obama has Advantage in Final NH Poll*, UNH 2012 p. 22

¹⁶⁹ Smith, Andrew. *Obama has Advantage in Final NH Poll*, UNH 2012 p. 29

¹⁷⁰ Smith, Andrew. *Obama has Advantage in Final NH Poll*, UNH 2012 p. 31

¹⁷¹ <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/state/NH/governor>

¹⁷² Smith, Andrew. *Obama has Advantage in Final NH Poll*, UNH 2012 p. 32-35

supporting a constitutional amendment to ban abortion even in the case of rape and incest.¹⁷³ In fact, the DGA spent over \$7 million on attack ads intended to tag Lamontagne as too extreme on a number of issues, including abortion.¹⁷⁴ Other outside groups also played a part in bringing the issue to the forefront of the state political discourse. One such group, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, invested \$500,000 in candidates who supported access to abortion and other women's health services.¹⁷⁵ This narrative played so well in New Hampshire in part because most voters already agreed with moderate policy positions on reproductive rights: 47% of women and 43% of men in an April, 2012 UNH survey said they supported legal abortion under any circumstances, while 39% of women and 47% of men supported legal abortion in limited circumstances. Only 11% of women and 5% of men indicated that abortion should never be legal.¹⁷⁶ Hassan's campaign worked hard to draw a contrast on this issue with Lamontagne, who had previously run on a more openly conservative platform but chose in 2012 to avoid the topic altogether when possible.¹⁷⁷ This is indicative of New Hampshire's moderate stance on social issues, reflecting what UNH Professor Dante Scala called the "live and let live," libertarian attitude of New Hampshire voters towards issues like abortion and gay marriage: namely, that government should not interfere in the private lives of its citizens.¹⁷⁸ The relative dearth of religious and socially conservative voters in New Hampshire identified by Andrew Smith undoubtedly undermined traditional Republican strength in comparison to more socially conservative states in the South and Southwest.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Landrigan, Kevin. "Gender gap may favor Hassan" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁷⁴ Landrigan, Kevin. "Voters swing Dems back into control big time Nov. 6" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁷⁵ Landrigan, Kevin. "Issues, not gender, helped NH women make history" *Nashua Telegraph*, 2012

¹⁷⁶ Smith, Andrew. *Tough Issues Facing New Hampshire Legislature*, UNH 2012 p. 8

¹⁷⁷ Leubsdorf, Ben. "Social issues simmer" *Concord Monitor* 2012

¹⁷⁸ Scala, Dante. Phone interview, 5/8/14

¹⁷⁹ Smith, Andrew. Phone interview, 5/1/14

O'Brien's Legislature

Although the success of the Democrats in this election was due in large part to this national focus on women's issues led by the presidential contest, it was assisted in New Hampshire by the actions of the Republican state legislature during the 2011-12 biennium. Largely perceived as extremist and right-wing, Republicans in the legislature (led by Speaker Bill O'Brien) slashed state budgets and services, promoted a socially conservative agenda and became mired in a series of political controversies. As a result, state level issues in the 2012 election became a more important part of the discussion than in the 2006, 2008 and 2010 elections. As one analyst noted after the election, the 2012 election saw the bottom of the ticket damage the top of the ticket, something that rarely happens in modern politics.¹⁸⁰

Apart from the Republican "war on women" discussed above, the GOP majority in the legislature also pursued a deeply conservative agenda in a number of other areas. Distrust of the GOP legislative leadership in this context was generally used by the Democrats as a way to mobilize their base. In a survey by the UNH survey center in August, 6% of Granite Staters identified GOP leadership as the top issue in the election, leaving the issue tied for third place after jobs and the economy (42%) and the state budget (7%). 15% of registered Democrats, 14% of self-identified Democrats and 16% of liberals identified the GOP in the state legislature as the most important issue in the state. 0% of Republicans and conservatives identified this as the most important issue, with only small numbers of independents identifying it as most important. 20% of union households, 15% of those with post-graduate degrees and 14% of those making \$100k or more annually also reported this as the most important issue.¹⁸¹ These groups, traditionally

¹⁸⁰ Crawford, Chris. "NH Republicans have no one to blame but themselves" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁸¹ Smith, Andrew. *NH Divided on Income Tax Amendment, Continue to Oppose Repeal of Gay Marriage*, UNH 2012 p. 18

Democratic constituencies in the Northeast, played a large role in the Democratic victory in November.

Union households in particular had grievances with the GOP legislature. One of Speaker O'Brien's personal legislative projects was a so-called "right-to-work" bill, which would greatly weaken the power of labor unions in the state. Although this legislation failed after Speaker O'Brien failed to muster enough votes to overcome a gubernatorial veto, it helped to energize the state labor unions.¹⁸² Although only 10-11% of employed people in New Hampshire belong to unions, organized labor still represents a key part of any progressive coalition in New Hampshire.¹⁸³

The GOP legislature also slashed state spending in a number of areas. These cuts notably included a 50% reduction in state funding for public colleges and institutions, including the University of New Hampshire. These cuts represented one of the most drastic, one-time cuts to state higher education in American history, and were largely underpinned by the ideological motives of the legislative leadership in Concord. This move was also incredibly unpopular, with 64% of New Hampshire residents surveyed in a UNH poll in August reporting that they did not agree with the cuts.¹⁸⁴ The overall state budget, which passed into law without Governor Lynch's signature, was 11 percent or \$1.2 billion less than the previous one, an enormous cut that sent popular services (including the UNH system and state-funded hospitals) reeling for funds.¹⁸⁵

Under O'Brien's leadership, the state House and Senate also got mired in difficult battles over unpopular social issues. An effort to repeal a 2009 law legalizing gay marriage, pushed by conservative elements of the legislature and strongly supported by both Republican gubernatorial

¹⁸² Landrigan, Kevin. "O'Brien has gained, lost plenty at Statehouse" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁸³ <http://www.bls.gov/ro1/neum.pdf>

¹⁸⁴ Gill, Maryalice. "64% in NH say ed cuts no good" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁸⁵ Landrigan, Kevin. "O'Brien has gained, lost plenty at Statehouse" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

candidates during the primary season (and by the primary winner, Ovide Lamontagne, during the general election campaign), failed in the House and was strongly unpopular among the electorate.¹⁸⁶ In an August UNH poll, fully 51% of respondents “strongly opposed” the repeal of gay marriage, along with 10% who “somewhat opposed” repeal. Support was strongest among Democrats, liberals and moderates. There was also a gender gap on this issue: 28% of men said they strongly supported repeal of the law, compared to 19% of women who felt the same way: simultaneously, 47% of men strongly opposed repeal, compared to 55% of women who strongly opposed repeal. Additionally, 74% of those 18 to 34, 51% of those 35 to 49, and 54% of those 50 to 64 opposed repeal, while 44% of those 65 and older opposed it.¹⁸⁷ These numbers suggest that the gay marriage issue was a winning one for Democrats that helped to motivate their base and alienate moderate voters from the Republican Party. Other social issues used by the Democrats to pin an “extremist” label on the GOP included restrictions on abortion, conspiracy driven opposition to environmental programs including the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and efforts to prevent out-of-state students in New Hampshire from voting.¹⁸⁸

Kevin Landrigan identified these issues as the major problem faced by the New Hampshire GOP in the 2012 cycle. New Hampshire voters, as discussed above, tend towards moderate or liberal stances on social issues. They had largely voted for Republicans in 2010 as a result of economic issues and voter fatigue, and didn’t realize how radical the GOP ruling majority would actually be once in office.¹⁸⁹ Supported by a national discourse that painted Republicans as too extreme on social issues like abortion and gay marriage, this campaign narrative of Republican extremism strongly provoked moderates and liberals in the state, helping

¹⁸⁶ Landrigan, Kevin. “Gay marriage issue done – for now” *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁸⁷ Smith, Andrew. *NH Divided on Income Tax Amendment, Continue to Oppose Repeal of Gay Marriage*, UNH 2012 p. 24

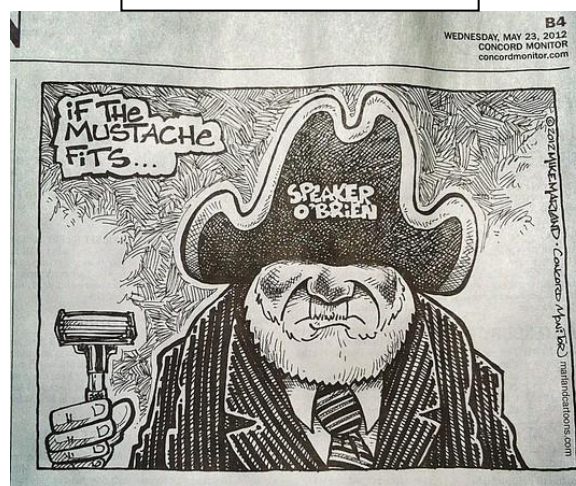
¹⁸⁸ Landrigan, Kevin. “O’Brien has gained, lost plenty at Statehouse” *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

¹⁸⁹ Landrigan, Kevin. Phone interview, 4/22/14

to drive Democratic turnout especially among key constituencies like women. The application of this national discourse to the state level was particularly blatant during the election. At one point, President Obama's spokeswoman, Jen Psaki *specifically mentioned* the New Hampshire state legislature's extreme social agenda (especially on women's issues), tying them into the policies of Mitt Romney in order to nationalize the New Hampshire election. The Obama campaign even purchased radio air time for ads with the same anti-O'Brien message, highlighting the importance of the speaker and his agenda to Democrats in the state.¹⁹⁰

Additionally, O'Brien's leadership style contributed to a sense among state voters that the speaker himself was too extreme for state politics. He instigated or weathered a number of scandals during his tenure, and received especially poor marks for his heavy-handed leadership style. O'Brien removed committee chairs who disagreed with his policy positions, including his own Deputy Majority leader. He was sued by two former state senators, accused of bullying several people including a female lawmaker of his

Fig. 5.1: If the Mustache Fits



Marland, *Concord Monitor*

own party, and criticized for barring a Concord Monitor reporter from attending his press conferences as retribution for a political cartoon run in that paper (which, ironically, accused him of being too heavy handed in his leadership style by comparing him to Hitler, see Fig. 5.1.) O'Brien's favorability was, unsurprisingly, relatively low for a state legislative leader. An August UNH poll put the speaker's favorability ratings at only 18%, compared to 26% unfavorability. The disapproval numbers were led largely by Democrats and liberals: of the 26%

¹⁹⁰ Connors, Molly. "Obama takes on the State House" *Nashua Telegraph* 2012

who viewed O'Brien unfavorably, 43% were self-identified Democrats and 42% were liberals.¹⁹¹ Still, the very fact that UNH included this unusual question in their polling (the first election, in fact, that they had done so in all four contests covered by this paper) attests to the electoral and narrative importance of O'Brien himself and the policies of his legislature.

Thus, Democratic victories in the 2012 election were largely crafted by a combination of state and federal factors. The narrative of extremist, anti-women Republican policies advocated by the Obama campaign and the national Democratic Party helped set the tone of the election. The actions of the GOP legislature, however, created fertile ground for state Democrats to adopt and adapt their messaging to the state level. The state GOP was unable to detach itself from the policies of the national Party. Unlike in 2006 however, this was not entirely a failure of messaging: instead, it was the substantive legislative and political strategies of the state GOP combined with strong voter disapproval predicated on criticisms of Speaker O'Brien's leadership that doomed the state GOP to electoral failure.

The failure of Republican messaging in 2010, however, is directly connected to the lack of agenda control caused by Republican actions in the State House in Concord. While the Democrats crafted a narrative that encouraged their own core voters and depressed Republican voters, the GOP was saddled with the actions of its state leadership and the national environment. Thus, agenda setting was a crucial component to the Republican loss and Democratic victory in 2012.

¹⁹¹ Smith, Andrew. *NH Divided on Income Tax Amendment, Continue to Oppose Repeal of Gay Marriage*, UNH 2012 p. 24

Conclusion

Explanation of Findings

This paper has shown that New Hampshire's wave elections of the past decade were caused by the confluence of several factors. The changing demographics of the state increased the proportion of potential Democratic voters, allowing the Democratic Party a strong foothold in the state. The nationalization and polarization of state politics severely limited the ability of the parties to influence voters other than their core ideological supporters, driving both Republicans and Democrats to focus on turning out their own core constituencies. To do this, both parties sought to achieve narrative control. The aforementioned nationalization and polarization, however, meant that these narratives generally originated in the national political discourse and were largely ideological in nature.

What Does This Mean for New Hampshire?

In New Hampshire, this has led to the creation of two separate voting blocs. Women and youth make up one such bloc, and vote overwhelmingly for Democrats when turned out to the polls. Religious voters and older white men make up the second group, and consistently vote Republican. Either group can gain the upper hand in any given election, largely based on the discourse of the race and the issues being discussed. Demographic trends suggest that the balance of state politics may continue to tip towards the Democrats, but the migration slowdown that occurred during the Great Recession may have slowed or halted these trends. Thus, New Hampshire's electoral future is in a sense uncertain, and largely dependent on future migratory patterns and narrative control.

But state political leaders in New Hampshire have increasingly found themselves at the mercy of national politics rather than state demographic or political forces. Although they still retain some ability to shape the electoral narrative, state politicians are mostly reliant on the national political mood to shape the composition of the electorate and therefore the election results. In all four of the elections discussed, national narratives trumped state political issues in this way. These results imply that state legislators and elected officials will have a decreasing amount of control over their political fates moving forward, and instead will be at the mercy of national political winds that shift from election-to-election.

Additionally, this research indicates that individual New Hampshire legislators have even less control than politicians elsewhere in the state and the country. The miniscule size of their districts and the rigid polarization of the electorate make it nearly impossible for these state legislators to separate themselves from larger electoral forces, like the national discourse and popular top-ticket candidates, and make their success contingent mostly on factors outside their direct control. The irony of this situation is striking: the hyper-democratic, almost town meeting-style of the New Hampshire legislature, combined with the trends of nationalization and polarization, actually lessen the impact of voter choice and encourage polarized voting behaviors. One way to lessen the impact of this worrying trend would be to decrease the size of the New Hampshire House, allowing individual candidates a chance to step out and differentiate themselves from other state and national candidates. This might also result in fewer wave elections, since voters will be making choices based more on individual, district-level factors instead of national and statewide partisan narratives. Ending the practice of drawing “floterial” districts, which collectively add a representative to districts which would not merit additional representation on their own, would also help make state legislators more accountable to their

constituents. Even in a smaller, more fairly drawn legislature, however, state elected officials would likely continue to find themselves at the mercy of national electoral forces.

National Trends

All of these factors can be seen at the national level during this period. Demographic trends currently underway are giving an electoral advantage to the Democratic Party nationally, albeit for slightly different reasons than in New Hampshire. Growing minority populations and the increasing participation of women and young people in national (especially presidential) elections have made it increasingly easy for Democrats to win elections when they control the narrative and turn out their voters. The rise of the Tea Party in 2010, and the general result of the Obama presidency, has been the further polarization of the American electorate, which has encouraged base-centric narratives that resonate with core supporters but exclude moderates. Further, the dominance of the South in right wing politics has fundamentally changed the nature of the Republican Party, pushing the GOP to the right on social issues and alienating voters in former Republican strongholds like New Hampshire.

The Granite State lacks some of these features, especially minority voters who made up a key part of President Obama's electoral coalition, and religious voters who dominate the socially conservative wing of the Republican Party. Still, New Hampshire is in many ways a microcosm of the country at large for the reasons discussed above. Additionally, New Hampshire frequently votes within several points of the national margin in presidential elections, and often reflects national trends with lower level officials (as it did in 2006, 2008 and 2010.) Clearly then, while New Hampshire is older, whiter and wealthier than the rest of the United States, it mimics larger

national political trends. So what do the findings of this paper mean for the state of American politics writ large?

First, the Republican Party has a serious problem with social issues. Driven by religious conservatives in the South, Republican sentiment on women's issues, gay marriage and other social issues have moved far to the right of the national electorate and have stymied the success of the GOP with important groups including women, minorities and youth, who largely support more liberal stances on these issues. Although pursuit of a socially conservative electoral strategy may still motivate core Republican supporters in the Southern, Midwestern and Plains states, it alienates both moderates and GOP voters in other regions including the Northeast. This was clear in New Hampshire's 2012 state election, where a focus on social issues in the discourse turned out Democratic voters who handed a stinging defeat to the state GOP. Discussion of social issues undercuts the effectiveness of Republican narratives on other subjects, particularly the economy. As the Great Recession recedes further into the past and the U.S. economy continues to recover, Republican focus on the economy will become less poignant to voters, leaving more room for the Democrats to inject discussion of social issues into the electoral discourse.

These findings also highlight the importance of establishing and maintaining narrative control in order to win elections. The Republican Party has dominated the national political discourse since the 1970s, appealing to both its own core supporters and traditionally Democratic working-class white men. The past few election cycles, however, have shown that the Democrats are capable of constructing equally successful narratives that appeal to their core constituencies. With Iraq in 2006, the economy in 2008 and social issues in 2012, the Democrats were able to

craft electorates that worked strongly in their favor. In 2010 Republicans used the same tactics and relied largely on their base to win the election.

These divisions also showcase another worrying trend in American politics. The focus on turning out core supporters has produced a highly polarized political environment, exacerbating existing ideological cleavages in the electorate from state-to-state and region-to-region. The shifting demographics of the country and the nationalization of politics are producing homogeneity among the voting behavior of certain sub-national units, especially states and districts. Perhaps counterintuitively, the wave elections of the past decade actually point to a hardening of ideological and electoral lines. Voter choice has essentially become restricted to two, polar parties, with most people firmly rooted in one camp or the other. The repeated back and forth swing in partisan control of government during this period was not created by people switching between the two camps, but as noted above is largely based on which party can better turn out their supporters through narrative control. This can be seen nationally, as most states move firmly into either the Democratic or Republican camp.

The importance of New Hampshire in this particularly polarized political system is directly connected to these wave elections. Most states reliably vote for either one party or the other at most levels of government. New Hampshire, however, has joined a new group of swing states with enough voters of both parties to change its results depending on the nature of each individual election. As polarization continues to spread and becomes cemented in the national political culture, states like New Hampshire, Colorado and Virginia, which have undergone drastic demographic changes over the past several decades to make them more closely resemble the overall demographic breakdown of the United States, will play an increasingly important role in deciding control of Congress and the White House.

Thus the saying “As goes New Hampshire, so goes the nation” has taken on an entirely new meaning. More than just reflecting national trends, New Hampshire has become one of a handful of states that directly decide the outcome of national elections. Continued study of New Hampshire’s political climate could therefore reveal important truths about the state of American electoral politics as a whole. New Hampshire may be a unique state with its own political idiosyncrasies, but it is a microcosm of larger American electoral trends that are driving our politics towards nationalized polarization in the modern age.

Where to go from Here?

There are several important areas of study that could add significantly to the findings of this paper. First, an analysis of campaign finance in the state would help flesh out and explain some of the trends identified here. The rise of the Tea Party and the success of Democratic candidates across the state often stem from large cash infusions from a variety of donors and sources. Tracking these sources and tracing the money back to its roots could add substantially to explanations of the electoral outcomes of 2006-2012. An analysis of campaign finance in these contests could also help answer other important questions. Do the national parties encourage or attempt to lessen the impacts of polarization? What interests funded and supported the Tea Party, and for what purpose? Did the support of wealthy Republican mega donors for moderate stances on social issues help or harm the electoral success of the Republicans in 2010 and 2012? These questions are vital to the story of New Hampshire’s wave elections, and certainly merit further investigation.

Second, a comparative study with trends in other states, especially the swing states of Virginia and Colorado, could provide context and balance out the electoral idiosyncrasies of

New Hampshire. Although these states have very different political cultures, they are all being buffeted by similar demographic forces and the resulting political changes that accompany them. Are the results of these demographic shifts different from state-to-state? What will be the future of these swing states? How will the concentration of voting power into a handful of swing states affect American national politics? This discussion could add mightily to the information provided by this paper, and offer a wider context for many of the political changes it augurs.

Finally, this paper will require adjustments based on the results of the 2014 and 2016 elections. Because Iraq and the economy were such dominant aspects of the American political discourse during the time frame of this paper, it is hard to separate them from larger forces at play in the results of the 2006, 2008 and 2010 elections. 2014 and 2016 could act essentially as controls for this study, helping to separate widespread systemic changes from the effects of major, but temporary historical events like the Recession and Iraq. A follow up, post-2016, would thus provide several important data points to really solidify the results of this paper.

Appendix 1: Nhteapartycoalition.org

In order to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the New Hampshire Tea Party, this appendix will evaluate one of its most visible representatives. Nhteapartycoalition.org, a volunteer-run website that serves as an umbrella for a wide array of Tea Party-affiliated groups in New Hampshire, is an important barometer of Tea Party sentiment in the state.¹⁹² Its affiliates include mainstream right-wing organizations, such as Americans for Prosperity and Cornerstone Policy Research-Action, as well as local and regional Tea Party groups. However, it does not claim to endorse candidates or political parties.¹⁹³ It should be noted that this analysis is not a comprehensive analysis of the discourse of the New Hampshire Tea Party, nor does it claim to be. It represents, however, a valuable anecdotal resource regarding the information that helps to shape the Tea Party's rhetoric, especially in New Hampshire.

Framework and Methods

Included below is a year-by-year analysis of the NH Tea Party Coalition news forum. The analysis begins with the first post in June, 2009 and ends on November 6, 2012. These posts are a good measure of what contemporary issues mattered to the state Tea Party in the period before the 2010 election and during the reign of the so-called "Tea Party Legislature" from 2011-2012.

These posts were divided into seven categories, which are as follows:

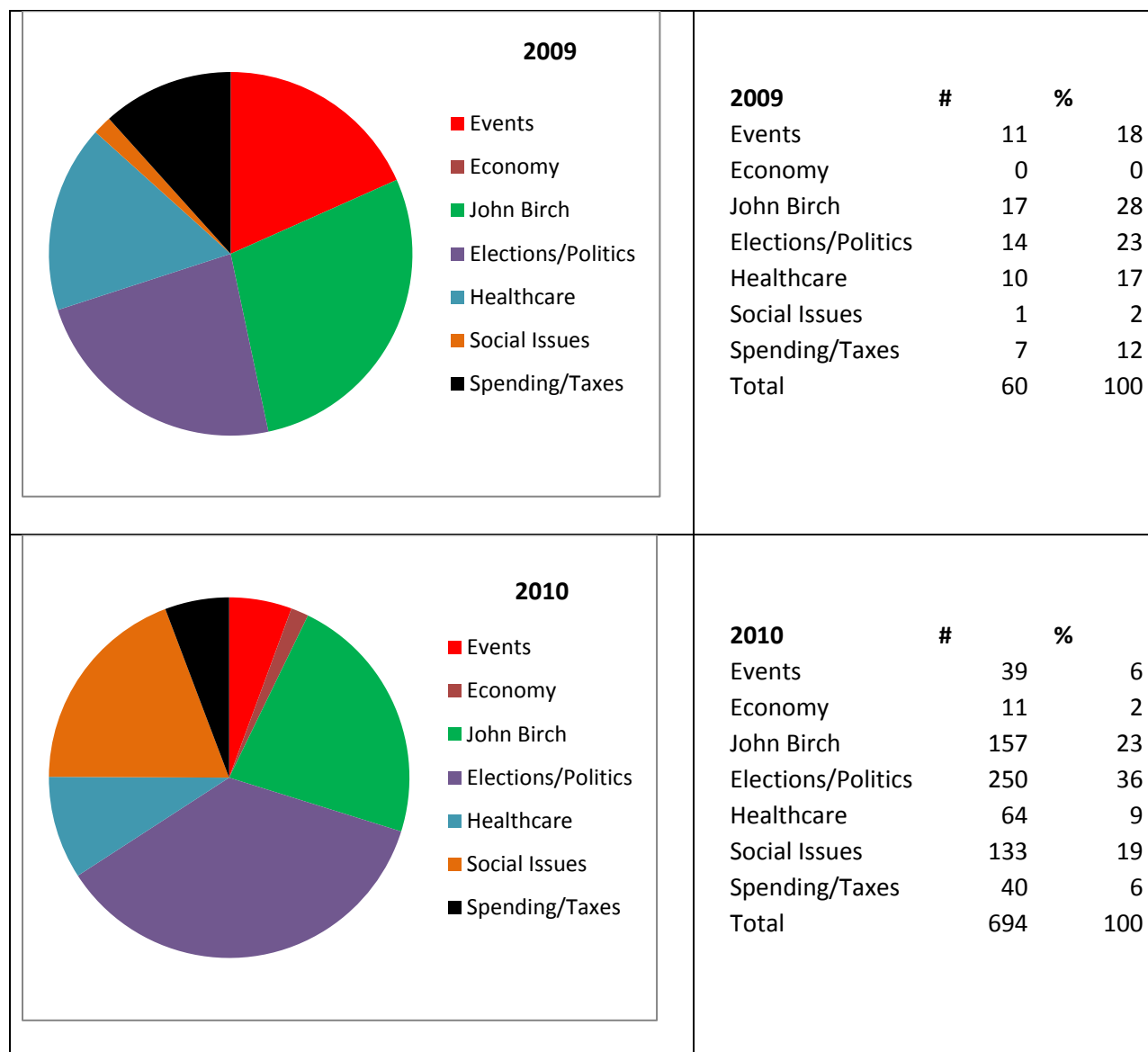
1. Events: This includes event announcements and general Tea Party information.
2. Economy: This includes any direct discussion of the economy, including jobs.

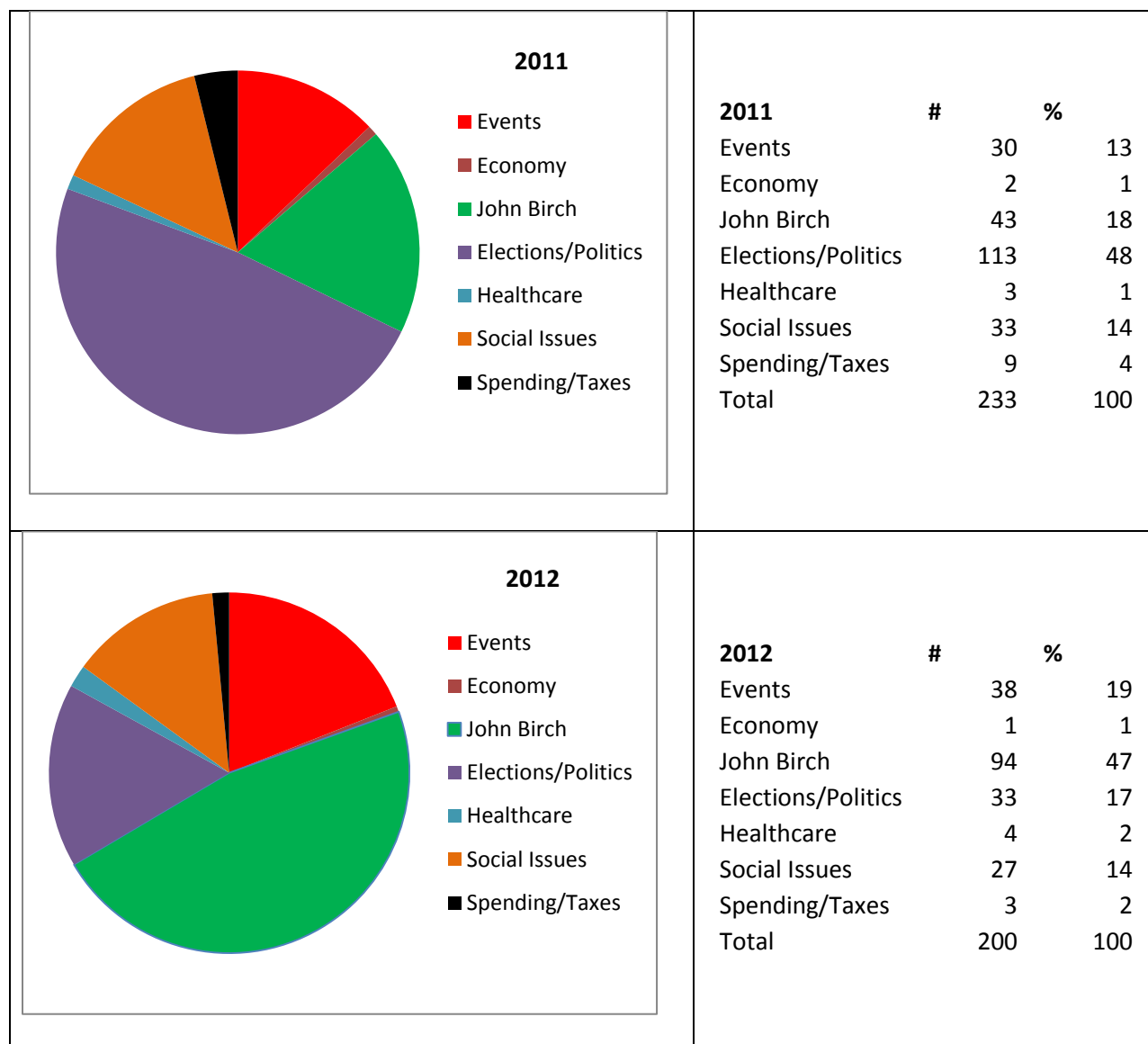
¹⁹² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/about-join/>

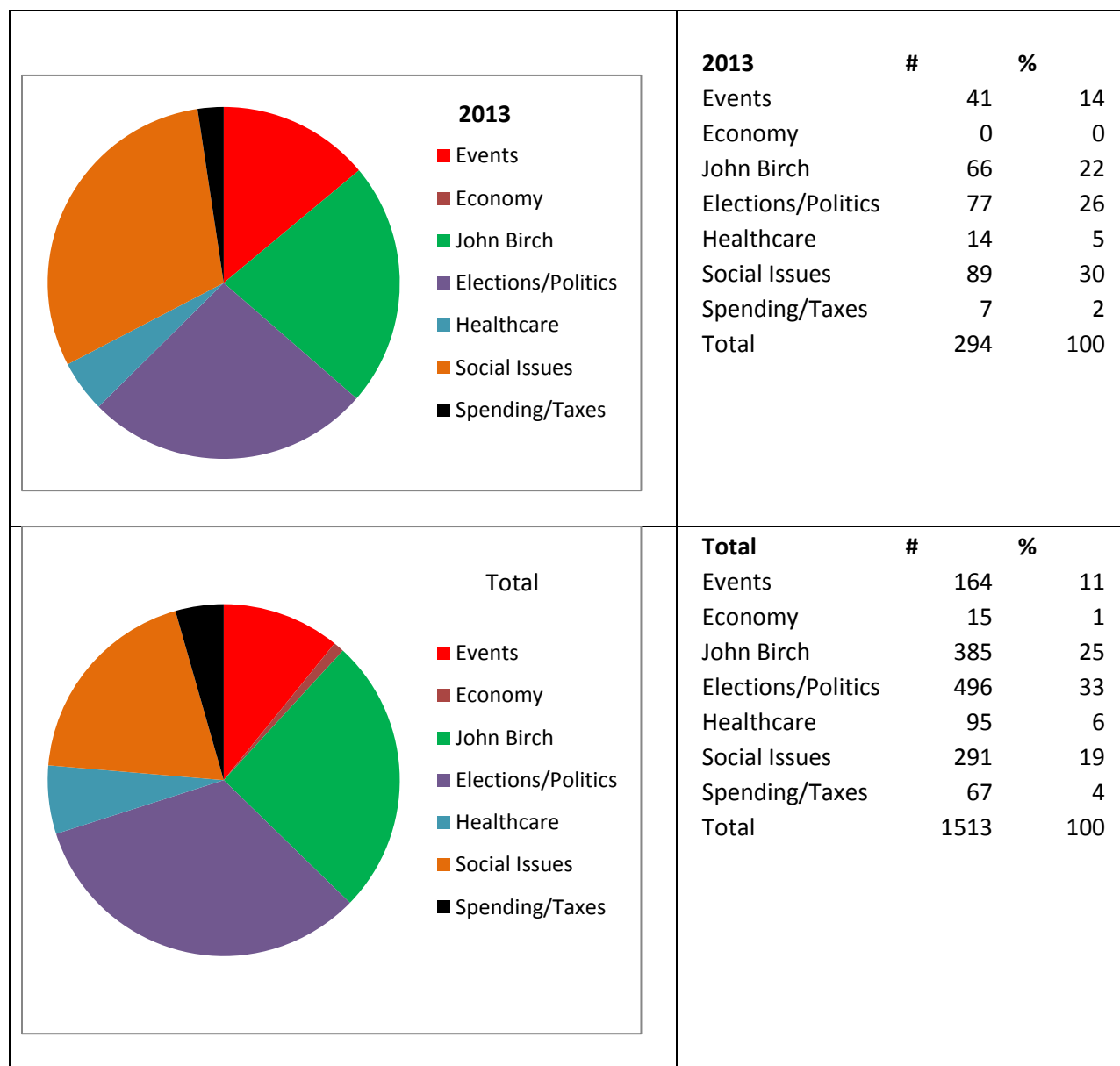
¹⁹³ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/about-join/>

3. John Birch: This category consists of conspiracy theories, especially “globalist” conspiracy theories, such as those involving the U.N., the I.B. program, the Federal Reserve or Communism
4. Elections/Politics: This includes anything directly related to elections, the political process or political parties/candidates. This also includes the political media.
5. Healthcare: This includes anything related to Healthcare, especially the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare).
6. Social Issues: This category includes issues such as education (excluding the I.B. program), race, immigration, gun control and privacy issues.
7. Spending/Taxes: Anything to do with budgets, spending or taxes at the local, state or federal level.

Nhteapartycoalition.org News Postings by Topic







8. Healthcare: This includes anything related to Healthcare, especially the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare).
9. Social Issues: This category includes issues such as education (excluding the I.B. program), race, immigration, gun control and privacy issues.
10. Spending/Taxes: Anything to do with budgets, spending or taxes at the local, state or federal level.

Each of these categories was selected for its relative importance to the movement as a policy topic. Since this was an analysis of a news forum, many of the posts were announcements for events hosted by members of the coalition. The economy, healthcare and spending/taxes were important to analyze because of their importance to the Tea Party discourse nationally (and, in the case of spending/taxes, a cornerstone of New Hampshire politics). The John Birch Society conspiracy theories are part and parcel of the discourse of the American far-right, and were especially important to the New Hampshire Tea Party: ditto elections/politics, which were often posts criticizing candidates or progressive activists. Finally, the social issues posts share a common thread of reactionary social conservatism, especially criticisms of public education, gun control and race.

Findings: Politics Come First

Unsurprisingly, the New Hampshire Tea Party appears to be primarily concerned with politics. Overall, a third of the posts were directly concerned with elections or politics, and the yearly totals ranged from 17% to 48%. A few of these posts contained positive statements, especially those in support of libertarian Republican Congressman and presidential candidate Ron Paul. For instance, a post from May 22, 2012, entitled “New Jersey Tea Parties Endorse Ron

Paul,” refers to the Congressman as the, “only conservative candidate and sole person who will not allow the engineered collapse of the dollar and whose supporters founded the movement in 2007.”¹⁹⁴ The positive discourse on Ron Paul is so uniformly strong that one post refers to him as the “REAL ‘Father’ of the Tea Party,” a level of praise awarded to hardly any other individual.¹⁹⁵ Positive statements were also awarded to conservative insurgents like those in nearby Massachusetts, including Sean Bielat (who opposed Barney Frank in the 2010 election) and Scott Brown.¹⁹⁶ There is also a strong disconnect between local Tea Party activists and candidates (who receive strong backing from the site) and national Tea Party groups, who are identified as hijacking or coopting the movement.¹⁹⁷

The bulk of the discourse on politics, however, is a negative discussion, often framed in the terms of an intractable conflict between two diametrically opposed sides. Posts range in focus from state and local (“Setting Mike Brunelle Straight”) to national and international (“Hezbollah Harry (Reid)”).¹⁹⁸¹⁹⁹ They target the news and the “mainstream” or “liberal” media (“How Long Will MSM Ignore This?”) as well as Democrats and progressives (“Democrats Avoid Constituents on Memorial Break”) and individuals (“Pelosi Heckled”).²⁰⁰²⁰¹²⁰² Despite this range of topics, several clear trends emerge in the political and electoral discourse.

The first is a repeated invocation of the specter of Communism. Especially in 2010, Democrats and progressives are repeatedly categorized and associated with Communists. The discourse often attempts to connect Democrats with the Communist Party of the United States

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/05/22/new-jersey-tea-parties-endorse-ron-paul/>

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/02/10/news-from-the-real-father-of-the-tea-party/>

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/10/18/first-it-was-the-kennedy-dynasty-and-now/>

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/04/the-true-picture-of-the-tea-party/>

¹⁹⁸ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2009/12/12/setting-mike-brunelle-straight/>

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2009/12/12/setting-mike-brunelle-straight/>

²⁰⁰ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/04/01/how-long-will-msm-ignore-this/>

²⁰¹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/07/democrats-avoid-constituents-on-memorial-break/>

²⁰² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/08/pelosi-heckled/>

(CPUSA) and the Socialist Party, exemplified by one post title that reads, “Democrats Linked to Socialists and Communists.”²⁰³ In the discourse of the movement, these Communists intend to overthrow the United States and institute their own globalized order with the help of billionaire investor George Soros. This will be discussed in more detail, however, in the “John Birch” section below.

The Tea Party also seems overly concerned with “infiltration” by progressives. Posts like “Socialist Party Poses as Tea Party USA” and “Beware of Infiltrators”²⁰⁴²⁰⁵ belie an obsession with conspiracy that dominates much of the discourse. Furthermore, the Tea Party often accuses the left of operating as “Astroturf,” instead of the “Grassroots,” essentially implying that the left has no popular backing and instead relies on top-down funding and control.²⁰⁶

A particularly salient example of this belief is the obsession with Occupy Wall Street, the left-wing protest movement that began in September of 2011. Beginning with the first post about the Occupy movement on October 7, 2011, almost half of the remaining posts in that year are directly related to OWS. Despite their discursive similarity in the discourse of corporate domination and despite being similar manifestations of public anger at the government, the Tea Party clearly views Occupy Wall Street as a serious threat to the social and political order of the United States. This seems to be based in a belief that Occupy is an extremist group funded by large corporate interests, especially George Soros.²⁰⁷ It also seems that the Tea Party views OWS as deviant, racist, criminal and violent.²⁰⁸

²⁰³ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/07/30/democrats-linked-to-socialists-and-communists/>

²⁰⁴ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/04/19/socialist-party-poses-as-tea-party-usa/>

²⁰⁵ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/03/30/beware-of-infiltrators/>

²⁰⁶ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/11/22/vast-left-wing-astroturf-network-hush-up/>

²⁰⁷ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/11/18/occupy-movement-not-what-you-think/>

²⁰⁸ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/111106-tea-party-vs-ows-chart.gif>

	TEA PARTY	#Occupy
Anti-Semitism	X	✓
Arrests	X	✓
Assaults	X	✓
Attacking Police	X	✓
Child Abuse	X	✓
Child Molestation	X	✓
Crapping On Police Cars	X	✓
Death Threats	X	✓
Deaths	X	✓
Desecrating War Memorials	X	✓
Drugs	X	✓
Exposing Genitals	X	✓
Flag Desecration	X	✓
Increased Crime Rate	X	✓
Job Losses (As Result Of Protest)	X	✓
Mindless Chanting	X	✓
Promotion Of Deviant Sex	X	✓
Prostitution	X	✓
Public Masturbation	X	✓
Public Urination	X	✓
Rapes	X	✓
Racism	X	✓
Spitting On People	X	✓
Support From Known Extremist/Terrorist Groups	X	✓
Theft Among Protesters	X	✓
Vandalism	X	✓
Violence	X	✓
Considered DANGEROUS By Current Administration	✓	X

(2011 The Jawa Report)
<http://mypetjawa.mu.nu/archives/209789.php>
<http://biggovernment.com/jjmo1te/2011/10/28/occupywallstreet-the-rap-sheet-so-far/>

Fig. A.1:

Source: nhteapartycoalition.org

Another key aspect of the political discourse is a focus on this supposed left-wing violence. Posts like, “Leftist Violence Turns Ugly AGAIN” and “When Will the Violence Stop?” pin the blame for violence on the left and implicitly argue that the left is full of hate and violence.²⁰⁹²¹⁰ This narrative is incorporated into the criticisms of Occupy Wall Street.²¹¹ There is also a strong sentiment that both the government and the media ignore incidents of left wing violence. In “Progressive Violence Has Gone

Fig. A.2:



Source: nhteapartycoalition.org

Too Far?”, the author shows a picture of a sign that says, “THE ONLY GOOD Republican is a DEAD Republican,” under which the caption reads, ‘Where is SPLC, DHS, and the media on the threat of left-wing violence?’²¹²

Political candidates and elected officials also receive a large share of the negative attention. Condemnation of Democratic officials and candidates at the national and state level are common, including the typical anti-Obama (“Obama Will Act as Dictator”), anti-Reid (“The Fascism of Harry Reid”) and anti-Pelosi fare (“Pelosi Public Parasite”), as well as posts that targeted popular Democratic governor John Lynch (“Governor Lynch: Selling Us Out to China?”).²¹³²¹⁴²¹⁵²¹⁶ More surprising than that targeting of Democrats, however, was the strong distaste for certain Republican candidates in the lead up to the election 2012 presidential election. It is not surprising that the Tea Party would disown Mitt Romney (“Tea Party Does

²⁰⁹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2009/12/07/leftist-violence-turns-ugly-again/>

²¹⁰ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/04/18/when-will-the-violence-stop/>

²¹¹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/10/08/soros-hires-actors-to-stage-violence/>

²¹² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/04/01/progressive-violence-has-gone-too-far/>

²¹³ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/10/12/obama-will-act-as-dictator/>

²¹⁴ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/10/13/the-fascism-of-harry-reid/>

²¹⁵ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/14/pelosi-public-parasite/>

²¹⁶ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/07/24/governor-lynch-selling-us-out-to-china/>

NOT Endorse Mitt Romney”) or that the New Hampshire Tea Party would denounce Newt Gingrich (“Newt and the Tofflers”).²¹⁷²¹⁸ However, they also disown more conservative candidates such as Rick Santorum (“And You Thought These Folks Were CONSERVATIVES?”), generally for being insufficiently conservative or supporting so-called “globalist” positions.²¹⁹

John Birch is Back

In fact, globalism appears to be one of the strongest underlying themes of the entire discourse. Anyone who is considered to be sympathetic to the U.N. or global governance is immediately assumed to be a probable Communist and an enemy of the movement. Moreover, the Tea Party views most political figures, especially Democrats and progressives, as being complicit or even responsible for an ongoing plot to undermine the sovereignty of the United States. They borrow these ideas almost directly from the John Birch Society, a populist, anti-elitist, anti-Communist group founded in the 1950s.²²⁰ The Bircher ideology, originally focused on the threat of infiltration by the Soviet Union, is clearly evident in the discourse of the New Hampshire Tea Party and appears to be one of its strongest motivators.

One quarter of the total posts focused on conspiracy theories drawn from the John Birch tradition, making it the second largest category. These posts mostly focus on the United Nations, and perceived attempts to undermine American sovereignty and create a “one world government” that will undermine personal and individual liberties. The most prominent of these issues is “Agenda 21,” a non-binding U.N. resolution adopted in 1992 to encourage sustainable

²¹⁷ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/03/24/tea-party-does-not-endorse-mitt-romney/>

²¹⁸ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/12/13/newt-and-the-tofflers/>

²¹⁹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/10/19/and-you-thought-these-folks-were-conservatives/>

²²⁰ Hart, *Practicing Bircherism*, pg. 130

growth at local, national and global levels. The New Hampshire Tea Party views this as an excuse for either the American government or the United Nations to appropriate all land for their own nefarious purposes. Headlines such as “Obama Locking Up Land Per UN Agenda 21” pretty clearly summarize the fear that “sustainable development” engenders for the movement.²²¹

The Agenda 21 narrative is based on a strong belief that climate change has been engineered for the benefit of the global governing elite and to redistribute global wealth.²²² In addition to gaining power and infringing on property rights, these “elites” are also gaining wealth by promoting the idea of climate change. Al Gore is a favorite target of this anger.²²³ George Soros is also identified as a major beneficiary of this so-called globalist conspiracy. The billionaire hedge fund executive, who often supports progressive political causes, is referred to as,

“...an evil man. He’s anti-God, anti-family, anti-American, and anti-good. He killed and robbed his own Jewish people. If George Soros isn’t the world’s preeminent ‘malignant messianic narcissist,’ he’ll do until Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot are reincarnated.”²²⁴

Soros is, in turn, a Communist, a “possible Nazi war criminal,” and an international financial criminal.²²⁵²²⁶²²⁷ He is “Public Enemy #1,” and Obama’s puppet master.²²⁸²²⁹ Part of this vitriol for Soros undoubtedly stems from Glenn Beck’s television program, which regularly featured

²²¹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/08/14/obama-locking-up-land-per-un-agenda-21/>

²²² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/11/27/climate-hoax-to-redistribute-wealth/>

²²³ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2009/12/14/its-not-about-climate-but-all-about-money/>

²²⁴ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/08/01/refreshers-course-on-george-soros/>

²²⁵ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/01/02/more-on-ows-origins-funding-end-game/>

²²⁶ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/03/28/putin-calls-for-arrest-of-soros/>

²²⁷ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/03/28/putin-calls-for-arrest-of-soros/>

²²⁸ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/03/28/putin-calls-for-arrest-of-soros/>

²²⁹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/08/01/refreshers-course-on-george-soros/>

biting segments on Soros. Whatever the reason, Soros features prominently in the worldview of the Tea Party.

Hatred for Soros might also emanate from his connection to finance and banking. A similar animus towards bankers drives the Tea Party to despise the Federal Reserve. The Fed, which helps the government regulate the economy by controlling monetary policy, is a traditional bugbear of Congressman Ron Paul and the New Hampshire Tea Party. The movement views the Fed as a dangerous private bank that secretly controls the U.S. economy.²³⁰ One of their most common refrains is a call to “Audit the Fed.”²³¹ This is part of a larger narrative that connects the Democrats and progressives, such as Soros, with big banking interests.²³²

The International Baccalaureate Programme, an educational program based in Switzerland and designed for children aged 3-19, is another target of the Tea Party’s globalist conspiracy. Many American schools have adopted the IB, which has high educational standards and a rigorous curriculum. The movement views the IB as a U.N. conspiracy to undermine American national sovereignty by teaching children the ideals of “global citizenship.” In “IB Program is UN on Steroids,” author Bev Eakman makes the case that IB is an entirely political operation with no legitimate educational purpose.²³³ Other headlines, such as “IB Teaches We Should ‘Tear Up National Sovereignty’” and “IB Teaches Students Communism is Good” give the reader some idea of how the Tea Party interprets the IB program.²³⁴²³⁵

All of these conspiracies are remarkably consistent with the JBS program laid out in the 1950s. They play to several distinct fears, including a loss of liberty, a loss of national

²³⁰ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/05/27/despise-weakened-bill-fed-is-being-exposed/>

²³¹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/11/04/yes-we-can-audit-the-fed/>

²³² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/10/22/its-official-democrats-party-of-big-banking/>

²³³ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/07/ib-program-is-un-on-steroids/>

²³⁴ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/19/ib-teaches-we-should-tear-up-national-sovereignty/>

²³⁵ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/08/11/ib-teaches-students-communism-is-good/>

sovereignty, the creeping influence of Communism and of societal, economic and climate change.

Social Issues

Anxieties about societal change were not limited to globalism. The Tea Party also seems very concerned with domestic social issues, such as immigration, gun control, free speech, privacy and the federalization of education. This category only made up almost a fifth of the total posts, making it the third largest category overall.

References to immigration are generally focused on “amnesty” for “illegals” or a perceived immigrant takeover of the United States. Often, they focus on what they believe to be social upheaval caused by immigrants. “First City Falls to Marxist Invasion” details the supposed takeover of an American city to illegal immigrants.²³⁶ “Border War Blackout” alleges that a full-scale conflict between illegal immigrants and American citizens was underway on the Arizona border in July of 2010.²³⁷ Other posts, like “Illegals Sue Arizona Rancher,” insist that illegal immigrants are, “...using these groups [pro-immigrant groups] to wage war on Americans.”²³⁸ A number of posts about illegal immigration are concerned with how politicians react or vote on immigration reform.²³⁹

Race also appears to be a popular topic of discussion. Posts regarding racial issues generally focus on the alleged racism of the left, and often include dismissive references to liberal charges of racism against the Tea Party. For instance, the post, “Oh Those Racist Dems!” begins with, “We don’t usually even respond to the ludicrous harping of the liberals on the idea

²³⁶ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/30/first-city-falls-to-marxist-invasion/>

²³⁷ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/07/26/border-war-blackout/>

²³⁸ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/06/22/illegals-sue-arizona-rancher/>

²³⁹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/06/15/obama-gives-immunity-to-800000-illegals-just-in-time-for-election/>

that the tea party was formed around ‘racism’...’’²⁴⁰ Other posts attack the NAACP (“Delusional Teaphobic Stalinist Behind NAACP Report”) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (“How Dangerous is the Hate Group ‘Southern Poverty Law Center’”).²⁴¹²⁴² Other posts accuse the government or the Obama administration of purposely fomenting racial conflict.²⁴³

Guns, especially in 2013, are also a popular topic of discussion. These posts range from those attacking Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York for his anti-gun control stance and activities to warnings about “gun grabs” or mass-confiscation of firearms by the American government or the U.N.²⁴⁴ Several of these posts demand that New Hampshire county sheriffs defend gun rights, following a national movement of sheriffs who declared their opposition to any federal gun control measures.²⁴⁵ Others discuss the so-called “Stand Your Ground” laws and the Trayvon Martin case.²⁴⁶²⁴⁷

Other posts detail privacy issues, especially the federal regulation of the internet. Many posts are concerned with “net neutrality,” which would treat all internet content equally. The Tea Party seems to conceptualize Net Neutrality as a “power grab” that will bring the US “one step closer to... nationalizing the internet, phone, and cable companies.”²⁴⁸ This narrative is similar to the Agenda 21 narrative in some respects, although it does not imply direct foreign involvement. Instead, it is a more traditionally libertarian narrative of freedom.

²⁴⁰ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/10/25/oh-those-racist-dems/>

²⁴¹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/10/23/delusional-teaphobic-stalinist-behind-naacp-report/>

²⁴² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/06/11/how-dangerous-is-the-hate-group-southern-poverty-law-center/>

²⁴³ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/07/11/is-our-own-doj-fomenting-racial-unrest/>

²⁴⁴ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/12/14/gun-violence-on-cue-for-obama-gun-grab/>

²⁴⁵ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/01/28/grafon-county-nh-sheriff-among-patriots-who-will-uphold-the-constitution/>

²⁴⁶ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/02/23/stand-your-ground-in-nh/>

²⁴⁷ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/07/05/demands-to-kill-george-zimmerman-ok-with-facebook/>

²⁴⁸ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2011/11/08/save-the-internet-from-government/>

Tied into this narrative of freedom is another narrative about the American educational system. There are numerous calls to extricate the federal government from education at the local level.²⁴⁹ Inherent in this is a desire to rid the educational system of “Communism,” which the movement claims is being taught in most major school districts. Agitators such as William Ayers are supposedly behind this push towards Communism, as are the IB program and the United Nations.²⁵⁰ Many posts defend the practice of homeschooling.²⁵¹ Posts attacking the “Common Core” educational standards enacted by the Obama administration also figure prominently in the rhetoric about education.²⁵²

Economy, Healthcare and Taxes

These three discussions, major issues for the mainstream political dialogue both nationally and in New Hampshire, are notably absent from the Tea Party discourse in the state. Incredibly, the economy makes up only 1% of the total posts. Taxes and spending are only 4% of the total, while healthcare makes up 6%. This is likely a result of the unique political makeup of New Hampshire. If, as Ulbig and Macha suggest, the Tea Party is primarily composed of voters who have not found a place in the two party system, taxes and spending would not be fertile grounds for recruitment. There is no statewide income tax in New Hampshire, and few politicians would dare to suggest raising taxes in the state. The economic downturn was, as is discussed in an earlier chapter, weaker than elsewhere in the country.

The lack of a discourse on healthcare is especially surprising. What mention there is of healthcare is centered mostly in 2009 and 2010, around the passage of the Affordable Care Act,

²⁴⁹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/10/03/federal-government-out-of-education/>

²⁵⁰ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2010/07/24/teaching-the-teachers-william-ayers-teaches-social-justice/>

²⁵¹ <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2013/10/04/update-cynthia-chase-wants-to-restrict-homeschooling/>

²⁵² <http://www.nhteapartycoalition.org/tea/2012/07/31/common-core-to-cost-millions/>

with a slight uptick in 2013 as implementation began. It is discussed in the same discourse of “Communism” as the JBS U.N. conspiracy theories. It may be, however, that the popular anger about the healthcare law was used more by the GOP than the Tea Party.

Explanation of Findings

So what can we infer from these findings? It appears that the New Hampshire Tea Party is largely driven by their opposition to candidates and policies. They propose or support few policy solutions short of repealing laws and shrinking the size of government. Furthermore, the movement seems to be especially passionate about revealing Democratic and progressive causes as evil, violent and dangerous.

The prevalence of John Birch Society-type conspiracy theories probably plays a large role in this. Conspiracy theories about the environment, the U.N., George Soros and the Federal Reserve make up a significant portion of the total posts each year. Even posts that are not directly linked with the conspiracies often contain implicit links or passing references to larger forces at work. These theories form the cornerstone of the New Hampshire Tea Party’s worldview, and connect its various fragments together into a coherent narrative.

The movement’s lack of focus on economic issues can probably be explained by New Hampshire’s excellent economy and relatively low unemployment, even throughout the Great Recession. The economic focus that drove much of the Tea Party and Republican rhetoric elsewhere simply isn’t present in New Hampshire’s Tea Party, because its members did not acutely feel the effects of the downturn.

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